FROM THE LAND OF THE SHAMROCK

BY

JANE BARLOW

Fannie E. Lloyd

Xmas 1901

If thou art borrowed by a friend,
Right welcome shall he be
To read, to study, not to lend,
But to return to me.

. . . . .

Not that imparted knowledge doth
Diminish learnings store;
But books I often find when lent,
Return to me no more.

F. E. LLOYD, Croghan House, Boyle.

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FROM THE

LAND OF THE SHAMROCK

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

IRISH IDYLLS

BOG-LAND STUDIES

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FROM THE EAST UNTO THE WEST

FROM THE LAND OF THE SHAMROCK

BY

JANE BARLOW

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
A WHITE KERCHIEF	1
DINNY AND THE DANS	30
A CHRISTMAS DOLE	61
A WEDDING-GOWN	83
THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES	137
A MAGPIE'S NEST	160
THE COUNSEL OF WIDDY COYLE	188
AN OULD TORMENT	202
TWO SACKS OF POTATOES	222
A STORY ON STICKS	242
PERRY'S SHOW	258
THE VENGEANCE OF JOE MAHONY	282
AT AN OPENING DOOR	290
COCKY'S CONSCIENCE	303

FROM THE LAND OF THE SHAMROCK

A WHITE KERCHIEF

I

MRS. DEMPSEY made a patch of brilliant colour on the soft green of the hillside where she sat towards noon knitting in the sun, and minding Nellie her cow. It was early May sunshine, strong enough thoroughly to dry and warm the sod it lay on, so that Nellie had to graze along in the shrinking shadows under dykes and bushes if she wished for a dewy mouthful, while her mistress could find a seat anywhere else without risk of incurring cold or rheumatism, or, more serious still, 'the clothes all destroyed on me.' About these she was always somewhat fastidious. This morning she wore her skirt of stout homespun, deep red like a very ripe hawthornberry, a shortish, thick cloth cloak, blue as the smoke of her peat fire, and on her head a fine woollen kerchief, white as any mushroom awning when most freshly unfurled. The skirt was woven of yarn which she had spun herself and dyed last year: the cloak had descended to her from two generations; but the kerchief she had bought only the other day in Kenny's shop at Clonshone. This

head-covering was, in fact, Mrs. Dempsey's darling vanity, and the one point upon which she inclined to downright extravagance on her own account. She would always have it of the finest texture and purest white; not even a thread of colour in the border would she tolerate. As for those of bold pattern and gaudy hue, she would never so much as look at them, notwithstanding that this kind is cheaper, and by most people considered far more tasty. Besides, 'them *plain* sort don't last clane in the house smoke while you would be puttin' them on,' as Molly Moran urged one day in defence of her own choice —a large check design of a vivid orange and violet, which Mrs. Dempsey had declared 'drew the sight out of her two eyes.' But when frequent washings had superinduced yellowing and skimpiness, as repeated washings, however careful, will do, her reckless habit was to buy herself another, although it 'stood her in every farthing of one and ninepence.'

Only that morning she had taken a bran-new one into wear, and the sheen of it under the sunbeams lit up the long, green slope on which she was perched. From the opposite hills across the valley, a distance which blurred away the dimmer red and blue, she might have been supposed one of the district's pearly-fleeced sheep—a fleck of shimmering snow. Probably she was not aware of this particular effect; but ever since she had deftly tied the loose knot beneath her chin she had felt pleasantly subconscious of being well attired. In her opinion, that was by no means incompatible with the circumstance that she had not a shoe to her foot. To go with bare feet was her custom on all occasions except the very

grandest, such as the big Christmas Fair, or an especially splendid wedding or burying. Even then she often started dangling a small bundle in her hand, and did not complete her toilet till she reached the last convenient halting-place on the way, from whence she would continue her journey, walking with a painful pride. This proceeding of Mrs. Dempsey's gave rise to much remark among her neighbours, who were of the opinion that she 'was not a very poor woman at all,' and 'well able to go about respectable if she had a mind.' The elders sometimes reminded one another that Bridget M'Sheehan, her mother's sister, had been 'a rael ould naygur, who wouldn't have had the heart to spend a penny she could help, if money'd grown as plenty as pebbles on the say-shore. They wouldn't go for to say that Mrs. Dempsey, the crathur, was as miserable as all that come to; still, she might have it in her to be more than a trifle near.'

Echoes of these comments reached Norah, Mrs. Dempsey's only daughter, who took them much to heart, and all the more because they partly coincided with her own view of the matter. She agreed with Molly Moran, too, about the perishable white kerchiefs, though on that point she took care to keep her sentiments to herself, lest her mother might imagine them uttered in a grudging spirit; whereas Norah willingly would have given the clothes off her back, or the hair off her head, or, indeed, have made any possible transfer of property, be it ever so inconvenient, for her mother's benefit or gratification. But she had no such reason to disguise her belief that her mother 'hadn't any call to be goin'

about a show on them, and she all the while ownin' a grand pair of shoes and stockings laid up with the tags droppin' off the laces, and the nails rustin' out of the soles, and the moths aitin' the legs into threads.' Often did she urge these facts, and always without avail. Mrs. Dempsey was old-fashioned for her years, which were, comparatively speaking, not many, and she could recall the less sophisticated days of her childhood, when in her family circle to go shod savoured of luxury. She was used, moreover, to doing things her own way, having been early left a widow with three children and a small bit of land to manage as best she could—a situation which promoted independence of thought and action. Therefore she generally replied to Norah's arguments, 'Ah, sure, girl alive, what 'ud ail me to be thrampin' holes in me good shoes for nothin' at all? It 'ud be a sin and a shame; and, morebetoken, I'd a dale liefer go widout them. Why, when you've got them clamped on to you, you can never tell the differ whether it's the illigant, soft, mossy grass-sods and the springy stalks of the heather you're treadin' under you, or the ugly, rough stones and muck of mud. Bedad, I'd as soon lose the taste of me mouth as the feel of me feet.'

Norah would be silenced but nowise convinced by such representations, and would renew the attack whenever she visited Larnacorry. For, to her grief, she was living, not at home, but up at a farmhouse some miles away, where laborious days earned her the rare delight of now and then possessing a few shillings to spend as she liked—that is to say, on whatever she might have resolved long ago to 'be

gettin' the crathur, plase goodness, the next time she had a chance.' Her wages were as much as a pound the quarter, and on less than that she could 'keep herself dacint,' which was the most that Norah, though still on the vain side of five-and-twenty, allowed herself to aim at. Very seldom did a bit of finery beguile her into expenditure which entailed upon her the regrets of an empty-handed home-coming.

II

On this last return she had brought with her an unusually large sum, and had entertained especially high hopes of inducing her mother to be amenable about the shoe question, which she was just then particularly anxious to see satisfactorily settled. They were, however, all disappointed. Norah actually experienced the mortification of hearing Mrs. Dempsey bid Kenny's shop-boy 'reach her down them little white handkerchers like a good lad,' instead of asking to be shown that pair of 'wonderful comfortable boots with side elastics,' whose praises had been sounded suggestively in her stopped ears. So chagrined, indeed, was Norah at the failure of her charming, that when Mrs. Dempsey appeared after breakfast, new purchase on head and half-guilty joy therein on countenance, an ebullition nearly came about. As it was, her annoyance led her to make an excuse of some needlework, instead of joining her mother and Nellie on their progress pasturewards; which seemed a wilful waste, seeing that after next week she would find a woeful want of their society.

For Norah was going out to America. Her elder brother, whose young wife had lately died on him, had written from Arbutus City, Ohio, begging her to come and keep house, and promising her chances of gaining by a few easy *chores* among the neighbours many times the wages that accrued to her from her long days of drudgery under Mrs. M'Cluskey's roof. These brilliant prospects, however, weighed less with her than did the forlorn plight of poor Mick and his two infant children; and even that would never have drawn her so far beyond her mother's reach if her other brother had not been just then returning home. 'Wid Paddy to keep her company, sure she'll scarce miss me at all,' she reflected, recognising with a sort of humorous jealousy the notorious favouritism which had always prevailed in their little household. 'Sure, everybody knew that Mrs. Dempsey set the greatest store in the world by her black-headed youngest son, who was the moral of all the M'Queens, her own people.' She had fretted terribly when he took it into his head to be off to America along with Mick, and now the expectation of his speedy return to her was a great joy, which left a substantial balance of happiness even after deducting her regrets at the necessity for her daughter's departure. Paddy reported himself to have had good luck and to be bringing back 'a tidy little bit of money,' which he proposed to lay out upon what he called magniloquently 'the farm estate.' He predicted that they would have grand times entirely at Larnacorry.

Mrs. Dempsey, as she sat now twinkling her bright needles, was forecasting this future, and

embellishing it with the probability that Norah would soon persuade poor Mick 'to come back home, himself and the two childer, the way they'd all be comfortable together,' with other such finishing touches to felicity, when a short shadow and a soft step drew near her over the grass. It was Norah, who, calculating that she could not afford these times to lose so much of her mother's society, had bundled up her sewing and followed. 'Yourself, bedad, after all,' said Mrs. Dempsey, well pleased; 'sure it's a sin to be sittin' pokin' your eyes out in the dark, when the sun's just meltin' himself down into blazes of light over the land. You'll work twice as fast here.'

'Och, you ould sinner!' Norah said, standing in front of her and eyeing her industry with reprobation. 'How ready you are to be knittin' what you won't put a fut in yourself, if a body went down on her knees to you!'

'The sock's for poor Paddy,' Mrs. Dempsey explained. 'The dear knows what manner of ould flitters the child may be comin' home wid on him.'

'I'm as sorry as anything,' Norah said, 'that I'll be quit before he gets here to you. It's rael contrary, the steamboat takin' to sail when his is just comin' in. I'd ha' liked to have had a sight of him, and to see the two of yous settled nicely, till I'd go wid an aisy mind.'

'Aisy it may be right enough, anyway,' said Mrs. Dempsey. 'What 'ud ail me to do anything except finely along wid Paddy, and he grown rich, too? I wouldn't wonder if we would be ownin' our six cows agin' this time next year, instead of our grass to be

goin' to loss, wid Nellie, the crathur, noways able for it all, though, bedad, she does be doin' her endeavours, I 'll say that for her.' The possession of six cows was ever a day-dream of Mrs. Dempsey's ambitious fancy, because the privileges of her little holding included grazing for that number.

'Ah, sure, now it 's just the nathur of any baste to swally all it can, and no thanks to it,' said Norah, who was sceptical about any such self-denying thriftiness on the part of Nellie.

'Nor it isn't as if you was like to be away over there, jewel, any great while to spake of,' Mrs. Dempsey went on; 'for you may depind poor Mick 'ill be ready enough to quit out of it the first minyit he gets e'er a chance of comin' home. Plase God it won't be long till I see him, and the childer, and yourself steppin' in to us safe and sound, like as if yous was just after comin' back from mass or market or somewheres dacint and raisonable.'

'I 've twinty minds in me to not go a fut,' Norah murmured; but her mother was so rapt in pleasant visions that she did not notice the protest, and she continued looking out from under the snowy eaves of her kerchief across the sunlit hill-slopes, with plans for the happy time ahead spinning before her mind's eye, while the burnished needles flickered like flashes of Lilliput lightning between her nimble fingers.

A few days later, when, with dizzy brain and dazzled sight, Norah, for the first time, crept up out on the deck of the swift Atlantic liner, the first thing she noticed was that the heaving, cold-blue expanse around her showed every here and there a

curved snowy crest, which somehow reminded her of her mother's folded white kerchief gleaming in the sun, and thereupon the face it had framed, and the familiar old cloak and red skirt, and the bare feet she had, alas! cavilled at, presented themselves with a vividness which gave a keener edge to the desolate sense that New York was nearer than Larnacorry. But through her years of exile it became her habit and solace to make the sunny green nook on the hillside the setting for all her pictures of the dearest thing she had left behind. There it was always fair spring weather, with a serene azure, lark-haunted, shining over the dewy sward, where grasshoppers were scraping on the finest fiddles in the world, and wild herbs blossomed tiny and aromatic. And always the brightest sunbeam touched the gleaming white kerchief and rested on it, like a visible omen of safety and good luck.

III

While Norah, her daughter, went voyaging away to the west, Mrs. Dempsey was having an anxious time. She spent the first day or two in eager expectation of her son Paddy's arrival, his steamer being due at Queenstown. But a week and more passed by without bringing any news of him. He must be coming, she began to think, by the next boat; 'and, sure, even so, he had a right to be here agin now, or very nearly,' she reckoned to console herself. For further distraction of her mind she resorted to a grand improvement scheme which had occupied it lately. This was nothing less than the thatching—

no mere patching or darning, but thatching, body and bones—of her little house. The lustrous green pelt of moss on its spreading gabled roof had long been a grievance to her eyes, from which, now that her Paddy was coming home with a fortune, she thought she might venture to relieve them. So she made bold to bespeak from Mr. Kevin Fitzsimons, who was opening his big rick, three loads of straw, in full confidence that Paddy would willingly hold himself responsible for the debt. But here again a disappointment befell her, for Mr. Fitzsimons was perhaps more doubtful about his security ; at any rate he so delayed in executing her order that throughout another whole week of long days she vainly looked for the appearance of either the promised son or the promised straw. At last the cumbrous blue and orange farm-carts did lumber down her narrow boreen, with their loftily piled loads teasing themselves into golden wisps against the high, furzy banks. By this time, however, such was her uneasiness about the overdue Paddy that she had scarcely the heart to interest herself at all about the stowing away of her thatching materials, and she let the carters just dump the loose sheaves down anywhere they liked, which happened to be inconveniently close to her door and windows. In fact, the yellow mounds rising chimney-high almost overwhelmed the little dwelling, and excluded light and fresh air and obstructed movement to a degree scarcely realisable by anybody who has never gone through the same experience. Her attempts to 'regulate the heaps a bit' did but make matters worse, as she was quite unable to cope with the mass, which, under her

futile handling, seemed to grow in bulk like dough kneaded before the fire, or cream swelling unluckily in the churn. Her surroundings might have been a haggard in a small corner of Chaos. The disorder culminated when one morning heavy rain set in, and, fretted at the sight of her precious bundles soddening beneath the soaking wet, she dragged under shelter indoors as many of them as she could contrive. 'Och, but I was the quare fool to go litter the place up wid such ungovernable ould stuff,' she said to herself that night, looking bitterly round her crammed room, and sniffing the choky odour of the musty straw, while beyond the partition wall she heard Nellie coughing hollowly from the same cause. 'And as like as not me poor Paddy all the while wid the waves rollin' wild over his head—and maybe Norah's too for aught I can tell. It 's a dale I want wid a grand new roof over mine, and I left desolit in the lonesome world.'

By next morning, which dawned windy as well as wet, she had regained a less sweepingly despondent view of things ; still, her mood was dejected enough when, early in the afternoon, she began her slow progress back from the hillside, where she had been restlessly watching Nellie graze. In those days Nellie had to travel to and fro more often than ordinarily, since her mistress sought in frequent change of pasture relief from ruminating upon dolorous fancies. And when the two of them—one of the pair sauntering and browsing as much at leisure as if 'the pours and blasts were not entirely outrageous'—had just turned the corner into the boreen, what should the other espy but a side-car, a canary

coloured side-car with a little roan mare under it, drawn up as close as the heaps of straw would permit to her own door. And on that door, the key of which lay deep in her pocket, several persons seemed to be thumping loudly. Three men there were, and two women, girls with flowery hats, and blouses pink and green, which the wind was plucking rudely by the hugest of sleeves. 'Murder alive! What sort of grand people is in it at all?' Mrs. Dempsey said to herself. 'And me wid me skirt over me head, and me scandalous ould patched petticoat not fit to be seen.' But the next minute she had forgotten all about appearances in the discovery that one of the men was no less than her son Paddy himself, home again safe and sound.

That was joy supreme while it lasted. Only too soon, however, had to come explanations about his stranger companions, and thereupon followed woe. For she learned, alas! that the pink-bloused girl had on the day before become Mrs. Paddy. On the homeward-bound steamer had Paddy fallen in with this English Fanny Tuckett, and so expeditious a courtship had ensued that upon arriving at Queenstown they resolved to reside there for the requisite three weeks, in order to get married before proceeding home. Perhaps Paddy shrewdly suspected that the news would not best please Fanny's future mother-in-law; at any rate, he did not send it, choosing rather to attempt the position by surprise. So here he was with his bride, and with her father and sister, who had accompanied the pair, 'just for a bit of a jaunt,' out of their way back *viâ* Dublin to Manchester, where they lived.

Such, in brief, were the tidings Mrs. Dempsey bewilderedly heard, and under any circumstances they would have been grievous. But as it was, coming upon her like a fall of soot down her chimney, and finding her so ill-prepared for the reception of foreign visitors, with her little house all in a litter, and she herself a show in her oldest bad-weather clothes, and 'ne'er a bit of anything dacint for the tay,' the circumstances must be pronounced aggravated. Nor could the afternoon be considered a social success—such surprise parties seldom can. Although, after the first shock, she really tried hard to seem hospitable and cordial, even saying of the marriage, 'Ah, sure, it's better anyway than if you was to ha' got drownded on me,' the strangers were less polite about disguising their sentiments, and let everybody understand plainly that they had not expected to see Fanny settled in what Mr. Tuckett called 'such a poor-looking shanty of a place.' Mortal woman could scarcely say less than: 'Bedad, then, let me tell you, your betters was raised in it.' To which Mr. Tuckett rejoined, glancing viciously round the straw-encumbered room, 'Upon my word, mum, in our country we rear nothing better in ricks than rats.' Against these utterances of their parents-in-law both bride and bridegroom protested, saying, respectively, 'Law, father, 'ow you do talk!' and 'Whisht, whisht, woman alive!' and the altercation went no further. But a marked absence of pleasantness pervaded the party, till towards sunset the Tucketts were driven off looking supercilious and glum, while Mrs. Paddy noisily wept, openly avowing her wish that she could go with them, and

her husband blamed the 'ould trash of straw litterin' about,' which had, he believed, given a contrary turn to things at his home-coming.

IV

That was a black night for Mrs. Dempsey; and only the first, moreover, of many such. A woeful waking she had to clear consciousness of the fact that, though Paddy was back again sure enough, he belonged to her no more. Also, she never liked a bone in his new proprietress's skin, soon, indeed, coming to hate the sight of Fanny's gaudily attired form and the sound of the high-pitched 'furrin' voice. Nor was Fanny behindhand in reciprocating these sentiments. Then, what with Mrs. Dempsey's desire to continue her custom of managing things her own way, and Mrs. Paddy's eagerness to begin that alluring process, the household became a scene of frequent skirmishes, in which the older woman had no ally. Paddy always sided with his wife. Even in the dispute about who was to have the 'loan of a sate on Devlin's car to the pattern away at Moynadore,' he had said: 'Ah, sure, mother, it's too ould you are to be drivin' that far!' And he, as Mrs. Dempsey bitterly remembered, that not so long ago would have been ready to choke anybody who had offered to say there was a sign of ould age on her. Those unlucky straw-loads, again, provided immediate occasion for disagreement. With deep mortification Mrs. Dempsey found that she was considered to have taken too much upon herself in bespeaking them, that Paddy disapproved of the

proposed thatching, and that he would not be responsible for the debt. He threw out some hints about intentions of having a slated roof over their heads before long, but she was depressed below the point of feeling any pride in the prospect of that grandeur. Paddy's repudiation embarrassed her sorely, and the unpaid-for, superfluous straw grew into a sort of daily nightmare. At last, after putting up with much nagging about its 'awk'ardness' on the premises, she prevailed on Farmer Fitzsimons to take a portion of it back, as a great favour—and Mrs. Dempsey detested asking favours—and she parted with her fat pig, at a serious disadvantage, to pay for the rest. But, would you believe it, ma'am or sir, that girl Fanny had the face to try stand her out that she had a right to have asked *their* leave about selling the beast—set them up! and she feeding the creature twice a day half a year before, by ill-luck, she ever heard tell there was any such an ignorant, unmannerly hussy coming about the place to be giving her impudence.

It was no wonder, indeed, that this outrageous claim made her extremely indignant, for now, more than ever before, did it behove her to be tenacious of proprietorship in the little steading and the live stock. If Paddy had come home to her as she had hoped, she would not have been at all careful to stand upon her rights; but now, since things were so deplorably altered, it seemed to her as though in the fact that she owned Nellie, and the bit of poultry, and the couple of pigs, lay all the means she had of asserting herself against the interloper. It is true that the roof over their uneasy heads was no less

certainly her property, yet she never took this into consideration, simply because the thought of Paddy's seeking any other abode than 'the ould place at home' had never occurred to her. The beasts and bit of land were a different matter, which conferred predominance and authority, enabling her to feel herself every inch the mistress still, despite all the finery and insolence, the meddling and making, of this upstart daughter-in-law, with her loud talk about the wonderful great improvements *they* presently would undertake with some of their own money. Mrs. Dempsey did not want to hear anything about that at all. 'Paddy was kindly welcome—and any wife of his was welcome—to aught there might be in the ould place; but she would liefer they left it the way she'd been used to it ever. It done her, right enough. They could fix it accordin' as they liked once she quit out of it; but, glory be to goodness! she was strong and hearty yet.'

This, however, did not fall in with the views of Mrs. Paddy, nor of her husband, who at present saw most things blindly through her eyes. For the truth was that they had set their hearts on building a new house, and on getting the holding into Paddy's hands before he applied for a loan from the Land Commissioners. Paddy was of the opinion that she might now very well sell her interest in it to him—'cheap,' Mrs. Paddy interpolated—and, of course, go on living with them all the same, 'so long,' added her daughter-in-law, 'as she didn't interfere in what was no business of hers.' Obviously, then, nothing could be more inconvenient and unreasonable than Mrs. Dempsey's attitude.

Matters standing thus, it was a very crushing blow to her when, towards the Fall, her cherished Nellie 'took and died on her' of some mysterious malady, brief and fatal, which baffled the skill of the most knowledgeable cow-doctor. Her loss was altogether irreparable. What good did it do her that Paddy bought himself a couple of heifers at the next Meenoughter fair? They were ugly-looking little weasels of things to her mind, and no affair of hers, anyhow. Not that she would put the poor lad out of conceit with them. But you might go far enough before you'd find the equal of poor Nellie; the kindest cow in Ireland, with more nature in her than plenty of human beings. Heavily dragged the lonesome mornings without anything to milk or mind; and then Mrs. Paddy must needs 'up and sauce her about scalding the churn.'

The ins and outs of it all would be too long a story, but the upshot of it is not difficult to foresee. Those two young people, both headstrong and energetic, disposed to hustle and grab, equipped, in short, for getting on in the world, were pitted against an older and less experienced woman, irritated and dejected by jealousy and disappointment, and separated from those who might have effectively taken her part. She was prone, moreover, to sentimental rather than practical notions about property. All these things told against her in the contest, and its end was that one March day, after an unusually disturbed period, she announced her intention of 'taking herself off out of a place where nobody wanted her, to go live with poor Biddy M'Queen away beyond at Letterard, who

would be glad enough of her company. She would take her few fowls, and the pigs, and her bed, and get along well enough with her knitting.'

Now this Biddy M'Queen was a very indigent, half-crazy old kinswoman, who had her dwelling a dozen miles away on a bleak, sea-fronting hillside, where the flecks of fields are strewn with stones as thickly almost as the shingly strand below. Time was when the proposal would have shocked Paddy exceedingly, but now Fanny's open joy at it made him see it in a new light, and he let his mother go without remonstrance. He did, it is true, salve his conscience somewhat by insisting that she should take a few pounds in consideration of her relinquished claims upon the home at Larnacorry. He thrust them upon her in the rueful moments of leave-taking, and they caused her to feel heart-brokenly rich as she counted the wet notes—few they were indeed—jogging along out under the rain. Further, he cheered himself with the reflection that some people believed old Biddy to be a great miser, and possessed of vast wealth.

If so, she certainly concealed it most thoroughly, as that bleak countryside could hardly have produced a more forlornly poverty-stricken dwelling than the little rough-walled cabin with its glimmer of weather-worn whitewash, over which green, slimy stains ran down in long streaks from beneath the eaves where weighted rope-ends dangled, and whose sodden thatch in this wailing March twilight gloomed against the cold, clearing west like a heap of sombre brown sea-wrack. Poor Biddy was in a moping fit, and had locked the door against Mrs. Dempsey and

her drenched donkey-cart load. The snowy white kerchief had come to sorry quarters. But away at Larnacorry Paddy and his wife were talking eagerly about their new house; while much further away, at Arbutus City, Ohio, their sister Norah kept on dreaming that her mother might be sitting, safe and happy, sunning herself in her old pleasant nook among the green pasture-lands.

V

We must not suppose that Mrs. Dempsey had been unmindful in these days of her absent daughter. Far from it, as, when her troubles began, her thoughts had turned to Norah as to a tower of strength, but, unfortunately, placed beyond her reach. Norah's faithfulness was a thing about which she doubted no more than about the existence of the sun. But this sun was hidden from her behind a curved-up waste of western waters, and could reach her with only most feeble and ineffectual beams. For the Dempseys were a very illiterate family, and that makes absence absence indeed. Mrs. Dempsey herself could neither read nor write, and Norah was not much more accomplished, though she could just achieve a scrawl, the purport of which could generally be deciphered by any scholar who had beforehand any sufficient data for guessing. A communication of this sort came from her 'only of a very odd while,' which at Larnacorry means extremely seldom. It was always addressed to Paddy, and answered by him, both documents being so curt and conventional that they threw

curiously little light upon the situation of either correspondent. Norah wrote to her dear brother Paddy that she meant to let him know herself and Mick and the children were getting their healths, glory be to God; and they had fine weather now, and she hoped mother was getting her health. So no more from his sister, 'N. Demsy.' To which Paddy replied in like manner, the difference in his case being a more deliberate suppression of facts. Thus, for instance, he abstained from mentioning his marriage, because he surmised that this elder sister, of whom he stood a good deal in awe, would be of the opinion he shouldn't have brought home a wife this long while yet—he was barely of age—but have looked after mother and kept things comfortable for her. For similar reasons, in a higher degree, he avoided informing Norah of Mrs. Dempsey's departure. He had invariably concluded his compositions with 'Mother does be getting her health finely, and hopes you are the same,' a habit which he did not think it expedient to lay aside merely because there was no longer anybody to give him the message. But it always formed the gist of the letter for Norah, who, spelling it out with a thankful heart, continued to dwell in a fool's paradise of security.

Unsatisfactory as such a correspondence may appear, it is so much better than nothing whatever, that it had been the chief consideration which had delayed Mrs. Dempsey in resolving upon her exodus from Larnacorry. 'For,' she had said to herself, 'how at all would I be hearin' e'er a word of them crathurs?' And now that it had failed to deter her

from taking the step, she tried what shifts she could to escape the dreaded consequence. Many a toilsome tramp did she trudge on a fair-day to Meenoughter, halfway between Letterard and Larnacorry, for the chance of falling in with some of her old neighbours, from whom she might glean a grain of news more precious than gold. Paddy and his wife she never met, keeping proudly out of their way, while they avoided her from various motives, in which compunction formed an element, notwithstanding that Mrs. Paddy had almost persuaded her husband to regard as highly ungrateful his mother's conduct in 'flouncing off like she did, after all what had been done for her.' This gleaning could be accomplished only by means more or less of strategy. For she was not, mind you, 'going to let on to other people that she and Paddy weren't speaking.' But she knew well enough that if an American letter had lately arrived, some reference to the fact, if not to the contents, would probably be made in the course of any judiciously guided conversation.

'So yous are after hearin' from America, over there, ma'am,' some Mrs. Kelly would remark; and, ''Deed are we,' Mrs. Dempsey would reply, in a most matter-of-course tone. Then, if this were a lucky day, Mrs. Kelly would add 'And all of them doin' finely, she says. It 's a grand country.' Sometimes, it is true, the addition would be less felicitous, 'And what 's the best good news with them?' the announcing neighbour would go on to inquire. Still, even so, Mrs. Dempsey would extricate herself from the embarrassment, replying, with much

presence of mind, 'Ah, sure, ma'am, just what you heard before.'

But at last a piece of news assailed her with an abruptness which threw her off her guard. It was a lead-coloured November day, several years after her flitting, and she had made her way over to Meenoughter Fair once more, in quest of foreign intelligence. There Kate Sweeny, meeting her, said, 'Och, then, Mrs. Dempsey, ma'am, is it yourself? How are you this long time? Bedad, now, you 're lookin' none too well. I was as near as anythin' passin' you by, only for noticin' your little white handkercher on your head. And so Norah 's after gettin' married.'

'*Married!*' Mrs. Dempsey repeated, jumping, Kate reported, as if she had set her foot on twenty tin tacks. 'What fool's talk have you?' And though she quickly recollected herself sufficiently to account for her ignorance by explaining that a bad cold had prevented her from going anywhere this great while back, Kate was not at all successfully taken in.

The news was very bad. For she had been clinging more and more desperately to the hope that one of these dreary days Norah would come back to her; and now this seemed quite swept away. She did not know the rhyme which says that 'my daughter 's my daughter all the days of her life,' nor would it have been consolatory, since the daughter in question had settled herself for all those days inaccessibly beyond unimaginable miles of ocean. The affliction came, too, as a ninth wave in a rising tide of troubles. Things had been going from bad to worse in the forlorn little hillside cabin.

Poor demented Biddy had grown more infirm in body and mind, and was now a bedridden misery. Mrs. Dempsey's few pound-notes had long ago melted away, and lack of feeding had obliged her to give up keeping her pigs. Therefore her small flock of poultry were left to be the tottering mainstay of the household. But lately some sort of 'quare murrain' had fallen on them, slaying part, and causing the survivors to stalk about bald or dishevelled, unchancy objects, such as one might imagine the fowl of banefully enchanted regions. The cutting off of that last resource brought dire straits. A day came when Mrs. Dempsey could not afford to refuse twopence offered her by a passing peddler for the last of her little white kerchiefs. And on many another, sitting cold by a fireless hearth, she would recall the time when, if she wanted a griddle-cake, she had nothing to do but plunge her hand into the chest of sweet, white-dusted meal; and she would think to herself how glad she would be now of one such handful to make a sup of gruel for Biddy, 'the crathur,' whimpering there on the bed. And then visions would rise up around her out of the far and further off times: of poor Nellie, with sleek, strawberry-flecked sides and meek, melancholy eyes; of frisky calves, impatiently impetuous, thrusting their round heads into wrong places; of a resplendently glossed cock strutting among neatest-plumaged hens; of the children—real children still—with Paddy, the smallest of them, that used to think a deal of his mammy; of Himself coming in from the fields, tall and young, and never to grow old—until at length hunger broke the spell of

these haunting memories, and she would wander down on the shore to try if she could gather a wisp of dilisk off the shaggy rocks, or fill a little battered can with clinging shellfish, that she might have something to boil by way of supper. If Norah could have taken a long, very long, look from the opposite strand, and had seen a worn, gaunt old woman, in coarse, ragged garments, clambering and peering among the slimy boulders, while the rough wind blustered about the grizzled, bare head and seemed to imperil the precarious footing, she would hardly have recognised the calamity, just because it was so great.

VI

All this time Norah had been experiencing plenty of troubles on her own account, over and above the anxieties and privations involved by the mere fact that she was 'away.' Upon arriving in the United States, she had found the affairs of her brother Mick in no flourishing condition; and thenceforward lack of health or lack of work had frequently infested their household. To get along at all was as much as they could do, Norah perceived with disappointment, let alone having a penny to send home. Therefore her poor little *scrawms* often contained an apology for being a 'dry letter,' which means, in the language of an emigrant, one without a remittance. It was well for her that she could not guess the fate of what few money-orders she did contrive to inclose. These were invariably absorbed by Mrs. Paddy, and never a farthing the better for them was the person

for whose sake they had been painfully scraped together.

But at last things took a more prosperous turn. Mick had a long spell of uninterrupted earning; the children seemed to have got through all their harassing ailments, and Norah was able to undertake some profitable occupation. And then Mick married again—'a very dacint, quiet, good-natured girl.' Whereupon Norah's thoughts immediately set homeward—nobody wanted her in Ohio any longer, she supposed; only then one Johnny Kinsella, a fine young man from the County Mayo, and a deal too good for her, in her own humble opinion, interposed and persuaded her to stay yet a while. He might hardly have succeeded had he not represented that her return would be only deferred. In a year or so, if all went well, he expected to go home for good, and take a bit of land in the old country. Such expectations are always very liable to delay, if nothing more fatal befalls them. In this case the year or so took several new leases of life before Mrs. Johnny Kinsella found herself happy woman enough to be actually homeward bound, with her husband and a wonderful toddling son, and a fortune which at Larnacorry would be considered 'rael grand entirely.'

She was all the more impatient to set out and get over because for some time past Paddy's letters had ceased to arrive even with their wonted irregularity. The fact was that he had left Larnacorry for a farm in a different part of the country, and had been too busy with the move and his other affairs, which were mostly unlucky betting transactions, to spare any of

his time for the correspondence. His silence did not make Norah seriously uneasy, as she knew from her own experience how natural it comes not to write; still, it added somewhat to the anxiety which is inevitable when one seeks to pick up the threads of life dropped nearly a dozen years ago. How many may be broken hopelessly off, and what lamentable entanglements may have happened! In this fleeting world one cannot let a gross of months slip by and think to escape some regrets for what has gone along with them. Nevertheless, she did feel secure upon the main point. She nothing feared but that she would find her mother knitting away in the warm chimney-corner, or, since it was now pleasant spring weather, sitting in her sunny, green nook on the hill. 'And she 'll be wearin' the bit of a white handkerchief shinin' over her head yet, I 'll be bound,' Norah reflected, to the accompaniment of the throbbing screw, 'and the sorra a shoe to her foot very belike, ay, won't she, the ould villin! But, bedad, it 's the quare things she might put on her or lave off her, that I wouldn't be as plased as twinty, and proud and thankful to behould—'deed might she so.'

Consequently the shock was stunning when she had led the way triumphantly down the furzy-banked boreen, and at its end came in sight of, not the old brown thatch, with mossy gables and blue, quivering smoke-plume, but a prim-shaped slated cottage of blackish stone and red brick, soundless, stirless, with barred door and windows, and a heart-chilling aspect of desertion. She could hardly believe her affrighted eyes, and fled on straight to the nearest dwelling, only to find there a stranger, who told her terrible

things as blandly as if she was just passing the time of day. 'The Dempseys that was livin' 'round the turn one time?' this Mrs. Brady said, standing calmly in her door-way; 'sure they 're quit out of it since a good while before last Christmas. I disremimber where to they were goin'.' 'Did their mother go along, ma'am?' 'They had ne'er a mother livin' wid them ever since I come to Larnacorry—and that's maybe six or seven year. But people did be sayin' the ould Widdy Dempsey was their mother, that come of an odd while to the fair at Meenoughter, and had took up wid another ould crazy body they called Biddy M'Queen, away off at Letterard. I niver was there. And they did be sayin' it was no credit to Paddy Dempsey to be lavin' his mother so poorly. I haven't seen her anywheres this great while. Bedad, now that I think of it, I 've a notion I heard somebody sayin' there was somethin' happint a one of the ould crathurs, ay to be sure. Lizzie,' she called back into the dark cavity behind her, 'do you mind which was it, crazy Biddy or the ould widdy they were after buryin' last week, of the two quare ones that was livin' below at Letterard? You don't remimber? No more don't I.'

Norah took a car, a bright yellow car, and was driven the long twelve miles to the stony country of Letterard. Sometimes she tried to reach the lagging horse with the point of her umbrella; but sometimes she wished that he would drop down with them all in a heap on the road. Big Johnny and little Johnny at the other side of the car could not get a word out of her, and concluded it more prudent to leave off trying. And when they reached the little weather-

stained cabin, it was empty. For a minute Norah stared at it dumbly, and then she ran, 'like one demented,' in the driver's opinion, down the deep-rutted cart-track towards the sea.

Along the shingly strand, olive-green, white-lipped rollers were tumbling over heavily, and leaving behind them as they receded tangled heaps of leathery brown weed, straps, bands, collars, and traces, as if some marine harness-room had gone to wrack. To the right hand of anybody running down to the shore, large rounded boulders are piled up, smooth and slippery; and among these a ragged, beggar-like old woman, bareheaded and barefooted, was stooping and peering in search of long, slimy dilisk leaves. Her search had disappointed her, for there was little to be got that day, and she had gathered herself only a meagre bunch. Suddenly some one snatched this out of her hand and flung it away into a rock-pool. She turned in wrath and dismay, thinking she was assailed by some of the wild children who had begun to molest her and call her crazy. But it *was* Norah herself, though her bonnet looked so grand, and her face did not quite match the old familiar voice. Norah hugged her very tightly, and said: 'Och, you ould, ould villin—if ever I let you out of me sight agin—if ever I do!'

By the time that the pastures were richly green with June, and Mrs. Dempsey had grown ten years younger and quite at home in her new little house up near her daughter's on the townlands of Larna-corry, she once more owned a cow to watch a-grazing; not poor Nellie's equal, perhaps, yet a worthy and amiable red-and-white creature. The first morning

that she was driven out, the pair were met by Mrs. Johnny Kinsella, who said in greeting: 'Well now, I declare to goodness, the two of us is the most contrary people ever walked!' Probably her reason for declaring so was the fact that Mrs. Dempsey wore on her head a little black straw bonnet, though she had the whitest of kerchiefs laid ready to her hand at home, and on her feet stout, well-polished shoes and grey woollen stockings, with which her daughter had been careful *not* to provide her; whereas Norah herself came stepping warily barefooted over the soft grass. 'And sure what matter for that,' said Mrs. Dempsey, 'so long as the both of us is contint with our contráriness? But I wouldn't wonder, Norah jewel, if I took to me handkercher again to-morra; this little black contrivance does be liker somethin' lit on the top of me head by accident. But I was just thinkin' in me mind I 'd slip off these ould brogues when I 'd come under the shelter of the wall. The feel of them 's rael unnathural.'

'Herself!' said Norah, with a sigh of satisfaction.

DINNY AND THE DANS

IT happened between twelve and one o'clock, in the very hottest heart of a fierce July day, under a hard, dazzling blue such as seldom overarches Irish soil. Low on the horizon to seaward a thunderous haze made a narrow, murky band, but there was not a breath stirring to lift or shift it, and the country lay scorching, unsolaced by the shadow of a cloud.

Mrs. Dan Mulcahy, querulous and unforeboding, had lately remarked that a body might as well be putting her head under a smoothing-iron as running out across the field, which she was obliged to do every now and then on account of her drying clothes; and her husband, with some of his fellow-labourers in Henderson's timber yard, had left off work for the dinner-hour. They ate their meal in a ruinous old shed on a slip of waste ground between the yard wall and the shore of the estuary. Just then it was dead low water, all black and green with mud and slimy weed, whence the strong sun seemed to be extracting a quintessence of malodours to season their repast. However, to set against this drawback, the shed gave them a sheltering roof, and for seats several handy crates and cases.

On one of these young Dinny Loughlin was

sitting with his head in his hands. He had suffered from a raging tooth all through the sultry morning's loading and unloading and heaving and hauling, which would presently begin again. His small bundle of bread and cheese lay untouched beside him, and his chief wish was to be let alone.

It was therefore an unlucky moment for Dan Mulcahy to conceive the idea that it would be a humorous thing to empty the dregs of his porter-mug down the back of Dinny's neck. But so it chanced, and, signifying his intention by pantomime to his tittering comrades, he approached the unsuspecting Dinny from behind on comic tiptoe.

At the feel of the cold, sticky trickle, Dinny sprang up with a furious start and hurled after Dan, who was retreating with exaggerated gestures of terror amid applausive guffaws, the first thing that came to hand. This happened to be a thick bit of red-rusted old iron, and it hit its mark on the side of the head above the right ear.

Dan stood still for an instant, and then sat down on a neighbouring crate.

'Sure, you needn't have gone for to do that!' he said, in a grumbling, remonstrant sort of way.

But immediately afterward he dropped all of a heap on the ground, and never spoke or stirred again.

Dinny Loughlin said hardly more, while all the rest were raging at him and telling him that he had destroyed the man. The only observations he made were: 'Sure, how could he be kilt?' and 'Sure, how could I be after killin' him?' He did not ever think of denying any seriously hostile intent; the notion of one seemed too impossible.

Dan had been his best friend, and was to have become his brother-in-law; for Dinny, although yet scarcely twenty, had been engaged 'this great while' to Dan's sister Norah. But it proved unlucky for him that the summer assizes came on at Waterstrand almost directly, before the eyewitnesses had time to take at all a dispassionate view of the affair.

Big, good-natured Dan, with his cheerful love of larking and practical jokes, had been a universal favourite, whereas Dinny, graver and less genial, was not so well liked as to have excusers ready made. Then Dan's widow, left desolate with three or four young children, and his old mother, who upon hearing the bad news had a 'stroke' which she might not get over, were objects to drive pity in and out. Everybody formed the worst opinion of Dan's slayer and thereupon sought the reasons, ransacking their memories for reminiscences of other 'words' between Dinny and Dan, which were easily found, as Dinny was hot-tempered.

All this could not fail to have its effect upon his trial, the upshot of which was that the judge, a stern-mooded man, sent Dinny to penal servitude for five years, and that only one of his neighbours considered him to have got more than his deserts, and refrained from saying something equivalent to 'The divil mend him!'

The exception was of no importance, being a person whose circumstances did not permit her to take any action upon her dissent, unless, indeed, we count as such her abstinence from saying 'The divil mend him!' She could not even apprise him of her

sentiments. For, as luck would have it, Norah Mulcahy fell ill just before the assizes, and was in bed while they were going on, and many a day after.

Perhaps her fever was prolonged by fretting at the impossibility of conveying a word to Dinny. Well she knew that if she tried to send him a message through the people about her, she would be charged with having 'no nature in her at all, for wanting to have anything to say to the villain who was after doing murder on her poor brother'; a very intolerable accusation. Moreover, her request would certainly be refused.

So Dinny, likewise in captivity, wondered and hoped and despaired during the few weeks which passed before he was carried off to the convict prison away on Spike Island out of reach. Undoubtedly he—or was it Dan? betwixt them be it—had done a piece of work with much thoroughness on that glowing July noon in the shed beside the sea-deserted shore.

The world was about a quarter of a century older when another Dan Mulcahy, whose parents had died while he was but a small gossoon, and who, having married Rose Feeney of Bantragh, had lost her some twelve months back, came to work on the new railway line at Rosnalough. With him he brought his four children and his aunt, Norah Mulcahy, who had charge of them now; and the party had scarcely been lodged for a round of the clock in their iron workman's hut, when all their neighbours along the row were declaring to goodness that 'the poor

woman was to be pitied with them.' But before many days had passed they learned to reserve commiseration for themselves, and bestowed little except criticism upon the newcomers.

The criticism was altogether adverse, and mainly well-merited, for the unruliness of the young Mulcahys could not be denied. Nor, in the opinion of outsiders, did their guardians take properly vigorous measures for its repression. Their great-aunt, in fact, openly admitted that Dan and Hughey and Moggy were 'more than she could contend with by any manner of means.'

Roseen, the baby, was still liable to flop down so frequently when walking abroad that she could easily be captured and pacified with a sugared crust or a tin canister to thump with a spoon. 'But as for hindering those other young miscreants of going anywhere they took in their heads, och, ma'am dear, you might as well be argufying with the water running wild there in the lough, when the wind has it all ruffled the wrong way. Outrageous they are for stravading.'

Their roving propensity, indeed, in the eyes of the half-dozen matrons inhabiting the settlement at Rosnalough, was the gravest feature in their misconduct. At first sight one might have thought differently, so profound a calm would seem to fall upon the place as soon as Dan and Hughey and Moggy had fairly departed upon their rambles. But hollow is the peace in a woman's house, and little it behoves her to be rid of the hunters of her hens and tormentors of her goat, if her mind is all the while distracted with wondering into what

deadly perils her Pat and Johnny are following 'them three young imps of the mischief, and bad manners to them!'

Rosnalough is a district which affords an exceedingly wide field for apprehensions of this kind. The long, winding lough, with its steep shores and deep waters, is in itself a source of many anxious hours to mothers of creatures who paddle as disobediently as ducklings at far greater risks. But round about it there is an unlimited choice of dangers.

Vast green hills spread out treacherous, slippery grass slopes and climb up to craggy peaks and swoop down in stark precipices, over which eagles have been seen to hover, and where even the sure-footed, black-faced sheep sometimes come to grief. Headlong streams and cataracts rush and plunge, and sunless ravines wind away goodness knows whither, while all these lie in a setting, so to speak, of wild, mountainy bog-land, where 'half-a-dozen children, or half a hundred, for that matter, might go to loss as easily as the white head blown off a thistle.'

This alarming region, however, it was the pleasure of the young Mulcahys to explore, and, what to their neighbours seemed the serious part of it, they evidently preferred to do so in company. They loved to lure away with them less adventurous Pats and Kattys, who if left alone would never have strayed far beyond the tether of the little goat; and the parents of these misguided gossoons and colleens found that to remonstrate with the tempters was rather worse than vain.

Other means, therefore, were sought whereby to

counteract the evil influence, and amongst them the expedient of painting in lurid and murky hues the unchancy objects, natural and supernatural, in which Rosnalough, it appeared, abounded. In those fine summer days many strange stories were related to audiences more or less round-eyed and awe-stricken about the uncanny things very apt to be met by 'bould children who went streeling off with themselves nobody could tell where, when they were bid to not.'

At any moment, it was said, the waters of the lough might disclose the hideous writhing of a *Piast*, that huge, amphibious serpent; on every hillside you might encounter in one of his various monstrous shapes the hobgoblin *Phooka*, horrible to behold; a keening banshee haunted all shadowy places, and a big black bull, with fiery eyes in the head of him as big as the saucers on Mrs. Flynn's or Mrs. Dowling's dresser, roamed promiscuously wherever children ought not to go. But none of these formidable neighbours, although they did daunt some faint-hearted excursionists, had anything like the deterrent effect of the person called the Crazy Farmer. No doubt this was because of his being founded on fact.

Several of the people who talked warningly about the Crazy Farmer had actually seen him, in the distance, at any rate, no great while ago; all of them knew where he lived, up in the glen by Drimesk River; and, more convincing still, old Martin the shepherd, passing there the other day, had noticed him 'landing' his potatoes, and reported them to be a grand crop. Somehow it seemed

difficult to disbelieve in the existence of anybody so credibly employed, and on the strength of it the children accepted him, terrors and all, with a faith which they did not as a rule put in the *Piast* and the *Phooka*.

Portentous in aspect and ferocious of disposition was, they were assured, the Crazy Farmer. A great white beard, twice the length of your arm and thick enough to smother you, and a habit of blindfolding people with it and dragging them off to duck in the nearest bog-hole, were salient points in the character sketches of him produced for their benefit. And they inspired all except the most foolhardy with a wish to keep out of his way.

When no children were within hearing, however, the Crazy Farmer would be represented in a somewhat different light. The occupants of the railway men's huts, being only temporary sojourners at Rosnalough, really knew very little about him ; but the dwellers in a small cabin-cluster a bit further down the shore of the lake were long-established there and better informed. And the oldest inhabitant among them, one Joanna M'Queen, declared, ungainsaid by her gossips, that 'the crathur had never done anythin' agin man or mortal so far as she could tell. Dacint and paceable he always lived ever since he come to the place, and a good sup of water, bedad, had run down-hill betweenwhiles, ay, had it so.'

'Then what for do yous be callin' the poor man crazy?' Norah Mulcahy asked one day, when this statement was made in the course of conversation.

'Sure, what else would you have us to be callin'

him? Ne'er a raisonable body 'd ever ha' took up wid the notion of livin' that-a-way. And supposin' he was in his sinses at the beginnin', 'twould very soon drive him deminted. Cracked and crazy he is right enough, whether or no.'

'Crazy twice over you might say he was, ma'am,' Mrs. Lonergan put in rather resentfully, as if they had been charged with slandering.

'And he 's livin' there this great while?' said Norah, dropping the question of his sanity.

'A matter of twinty year it must be anyway,' said Corney Flynn. ''Twas before Felix Sheehan died, that I know, for I mind him tellin' me somebody was after takin' th' ould house up above one mornin', and I buildin' me turf-stack. And Felix's son John, that wasn't the size of anythin' at all, bawlin' woeful at his father's buryin', look at the big six-fut fellow he 's grown to now!'

'The madman himself,' said Mrs. Lonergan, who was a little resentful still, 'had no great age on him the time he come here first. But he looked to be a quare ould gathered-up crathur when last I seen him, and that 's one while ago.'

'Sure, nobody gets a sight of him in a month of Sundays,' said Mrs. Daly. 'Even the Colleys' boy he gives thruppence a week to for bringin' him a few odd things of a Saturday, niver, you may say, sets eyes on him. Pat just laves th' ould basket sittin' in a hollow of the bank where the bog-road turns off from the river, and he finds the money ready under a stone, but sorra a bit of himself does be in it,—so Maggie Colley was tellin' me—as long as Pat 's there anyway.'

'It 's inside in the house he 's mostly keepin',' said Corney Flynn, 'barrin' when he 's a job to be at in his bit of field. Small blame to him to be a thrifle asthray in his mind, considherin' that it 's the only thing about him gets a chance of takin' a jaunt at all. He might as well be shut up in Galway jail.'

'I won'er what made him take up wid the notion of livin' that lonesome?' said Mrs. Daly.

'Throuble, belike,' said Norah Mulcahy.

'Well, now, woman alive, isn't it the quare plan for gittin' quit of that to go box himself up along wid it, as if it was somethin' he wint in dread of havin' stolen off him?'

'I dunno but it might ha' been the best thing he could do,' said Norah. 'It 's wearyful the other people are sometimes. And the foolishness they do be talkin' is surprisin'. It would disgust a body to be listenin' to them. I used to think in me mind that if they knew the shows they were makin' of themselves they 'd be apt to hold their tongues for a long while, and then say nothin', as the sayin' is. But twinty years is a great len'th of time to be that way.'

'What 's the ould being's name?' inquired Mrs. Dowling, who was also strange to Rosnalough.

'The never a know I know, ma'am,' replied Joanna M'Queen. 'Like enough we heard the time he came first,' she continued, by way of excusing her ignorance, 'but it 's clane out of me mind; and I should suppose they could tell wherever he pays his bit of rint. But the Crazy Farmer 's the name he goes by wid us ever since Tim Egan called it to him

for stickin' himself down where there's ne'er a sowl livin' for miles around, and not so much as a road next or nigh.'

'I'll ax him what it is, if you like,' quoth young Dan Mulcahy, thrusting up his shaggy, black head beside his great-aunt so suddenly that she nearly toppled off her chair into Mrs. Dowling's fire, by which this discussion was taking place.

'Saints and patience, is it there you are, you bould child, out of your bed at this hour?' she said.

For the summer sun was far down below the dark-purple hills, and the splendour-winged butterfly clouds of the west had faded into spectral white moths.

'Run off to your bed this minyit,' she ordered, 'or just wait till your poor father comes home and finds you up!'

But Dan anticipated that event with complete unconcern, being well aware how his father was wont to toil hugely all day, and overtime if possible, and return caring for nothing save food and sleep. So he sauntered off without any intention of obeying, and presently he stuck his head in at the door again to add, 'And I'll tell him the quare, ugly names yous do be callin' him down here, the way he'll come ragin' mad and wreck the place on yous! Bedad, will I so!' And then again he vanished.

Young Dan Mulcahy's proposal to 'interview' the Crazy Farmer, although at first thrown out merely as an idle threat, by and by rooted itself as a definite purpose in his active mind. Everything he heard about this eccentric person stimulated his curiosity, a passion which had been growing stronger in him

through all the nine years of his life; and he resolved to seek without delay an opportunity to strike up an acquaintance.

His younger brother and sister were not slow to fall in with his plan, which was an expedition up along by Drimesk River, as far, if possible, as the Crazy Farmer's abode. Arrived there, circumstances must decide whether or no they should make a call upon him; but at all events they would see the sort of place he was living in, and might have a good chance of meeting him somewhere about.

The two boys would have preferred to dispense with Moggy's company upon this adventure, thinking a walk of four or five miles rather beyond her powers. It would be annoying if she abruptly sat down on the way, and answered nothing but 'No, bedad,' when urged to 'come on with herself out of that,' a habit in which she had been known to indulge. But when they raised the question of her remaining at home, Moggy seemed about to roar, and the roars of Moggy were 'a caution'; so it was hastily arranged that she should come.

They started on their adventurous quest one fine, hot afternoon, which followed a rainy morning. Drimesk River flows down into Rosnalough by a path which it has long been making for itself, and has not yet succeeded in ridding of many rugged boulders. Its source is far away in a bog, which causes its clear water to be brown and its foam cream coloured, and leads one who watches it running past, back, in imagination, to wide and melancholy spaces.

For a couple of miles from the lough, a rude cart-

track keeps close by the river and then turns off to the left, leaving only a thin thread of a footpath to pursue the stream. To this point the children were sure of the way; after reaching it, all they would know was that 'somewheres, a good step further up,' the residence of the Crazy Farmer might be found. However, they made no doubt of success, and set forth confidently upon the first stage of their route.

It was a thoroughly enjoyable walk. They quarrelled scufflingly, on an average once in every furlong, and drenched themselves among the many twinkling wet weeds and bushes, and shied innumerable stones to dislodge imagined 'troutses' from promising recesses; diversions which made travelling slow, so that shadows had stretched far by the time they arrived at a place where the track bent and swept off into a brown moorland, while the river's bed grew rockier and became fringed with grey-stemmed trees. A low, irregular bank bounded the road for a few yards, where it turned away; and most people who fared by loitered there a little as they passed into or out of hearing of the water's never-ended wrangle with the boulders.

None of the children had ever before been at the place; yet it somehow seemed familiar to Dan, who got there slightly in advance of the others, owing to a recent difference of opinion which led them to proceed in single file. 'I 'm thinkin' this is where they said Paddy Colley does be lavin' the things for him,' said he, looking around. And then he exclaimed, 'Glory be to goodness, if there isn't the basket itself sittin' under the bank!'

Sure enough, in an oven-shaped hollow of the swarded bank was set a large, battered-looking basket, the only trace of humanity visible far and wide. The young Mulcahys in a row eyed it with much interest, until Hughey said: 'Himself's apt to be fetchin' it prisintly.' It might have been observed that both he and Moggy had sidled up very close to Dan.

But Dan replied: 'They say it's late he comes out. And the two of yous has no call to be stickin' yourselves into my pocket.'

Hughey looked relieved, and chose, under the circumstances, to ignore the insinuation. 'I wonder what at all he has in it?' he said.

'And where's the use,' said Dan, 'of wonderin', when the lid's tied down, and ne'er a hole in it?'

'One might try feelin' the weight of it, anyway,' Hughey said, and lifted it out of the hollow. 'Glory-lory-ory!' he remarked, dumping it on to the grass. 'It's as heavy as a thruck of ballast.'

Of course Dan lifted it too. But *he* said: 'Finch! Is that what you call heavy? I could carry it anywhere and back again as soon as look at it, if I wanted to.'

'There's a cake inside of it,' Moggy announced after an interval, during which three shock-heads, two black and one—Hughey's—red, had been trying to peer beneath the basket cover.

'What sort?' said Hughey.

'How's anybody to be tellin' what sort, when the string's tied in a black knot, and it's you has th' ould knife, supposin' you wanted to cut anythin',' Dan suggested pointedly.

'He happen might be comin' earlier to-day,' said Hughey.

'Och, if it 's frightened you are—' Dan had begun, when Hughey uttered his favourite ejaculation: 'Glory-lory-ory, if she isn't after gettin' it untied!'

Moggy had in fact picked the knot, and the contents of the basket lay open to inspection. Perhaps they were somewhat disappointing. The cake turned out to be a loaf merely, although attractively fresh and white. A long, greenish bottle contained lamp-oil. There was a box of matches. There were two grey-papered parcels, from the smaller of which a spirt of shrivelled black leaves came through an inquisitive rent, while the other obviously contained soft sugar. And that was all. Dan had just uncorked the bottle to smell it, when Hughey exclaimed at his elbow: 'Murdher alive! Moggy 's aitin' up the sugar!' which made him turn round hastily and spill a quantity of paraffin over the loaf.

'You 've done it now!' Hughey said thereupon exultantly. 'That 'll be the nice tasty cake!'

'Rax me th' ould knife, and I might be scrapin' it off,' said Dan.

'It 's the quare scrapin' 'ill make it fit for anythin' but poisonin' the pigs. You might all as well sling it down there in the river. And look,' quoth Hughey, 'at herself devourin' all before her!'

Moggy said nothing to justify her conduct, being for the moment agreeably gagged.

It was at this point that the children became reckless, and went rapidly from bad to worse. Hughey, grabbing a handful of tea, sprinkled it over the soaked loaf, by way, as he explained, of

currants; and Dan said: 'Let's give it a bit of a bake for him. Sure the hole there's a grand little oven, and matches and everythin' handy.'

So they collected twigs and wrapping-paper, and poured out more oil, and struck many matches, which only fizzed and quivered almost invisibly, quenched by the strong sunshine. And then they watched with rapt pleasure while the oily fuel burst into fierce, red flame, blackening the sides of the hollow with vile-smelling smoke, and scorching the loaf till it looked like some very infernal bakement.

This delectable process engrossed them longer and more completely than they knew, and they never heeded the shifting of light and shade, although a tall shadow did encroach abruptly upon them, nor noticed any sound, although other steps than those of the stumbling river did come by. At last Dan took a bit of paper which had escaped the fire, and with the end of a charred splinter began to print an inscription on it. He proposed to insert it in a split twig and stick it into the loaf, as he had seen a gardening friend label flower-pots; but he had only accomplished, in laborious capitals, 'A KAKE FOR THE KRA—' when a laugh close behind him left his work a fragment for evermore.

The laugh was loud and slow, as if done by machinery long out of use, and it came from a gaunt, stooped, grizzle-bearded man in labourer's old clothes, who looked as if he might once have been young, much in the same way that his laughter sounded as if it might once have been merry. It stopped soon, and he said, in a reassuring tone, which, however, was plainly addressed to himself:

'I declare, now, I 'm not mad with them! Glory be to goodness, divil a bit infuriated I am at all! And fine disthruction they 've done on it—begorra have they so! Just a grain of tay I have in it yet up at the house, but sorra a scrapin' of sugar; and the little fat crathur there won't be lavin' anythin' you could give a name to out of me two pounds. And me sup of oil gone to loss on me!'

He seated himself on the bank, and surveyed with a sort of satisfaction his plundered basket as it lay emptily on its side.

The children, quite taken aback, and forsaken by their presence of mind, seemed paralysed.

'What,' said the man, after a pause, during which he seemed to be in puzzled search of materials for conversation, 'what have you scrawmin' there, young chap?'

'I was just puttin' the Crazy Farmer on it,' said Dan. 'That's the name the people do be callin' you. *We* don't be,' he hastened to add. 'An illigant name we 've got. Let me see—what is it at all?'

'The "Grand Capt'in," mostly,' Hughey suggested suavely, but at the same time nudging a reprimand to his brother for indiscretion and want of resource.

'Ay, to be sure that's it!' said Dan. 'The "Grand Capt'in," and no talk of crazy whatsome'er.'

'And we could very aisy,' Hughey said, bent on further propitiation, 'be fetchin' you another pound of sugar from Mrs. M'Auliffe's, if we had the pinnies.'

'Och, no matter,' said the man. 'I can make a shift to do widout them, right enough till next week.

I can't be pitchin' me pinnies about that way. The Grand Capt'in—bedad, it 's quare listenin' to them.' He laughed a little again, which did not altogether please Dan, who, however, was emboldened by this placable mood to indulge in curiosity.

'The people do be wonderin',' he said, 'where at all you git your pinnies from. And some of them sez one thing and some sez another.'

'What things?' said the Crazy Farmer.

'Sure, some sez it 's a pinsion you have that the governmint does be payin' to you for dirty work you done ould ages ago——'

'Informin',' put in Hughey, explanatorily, but associating no idea with the term.

'It 's a lie!' the Crazy Farmer shouted, stamping down both his feet, as if he were going to stand up, 'and a black one! Just let me hear a man offer to say that! I 'll—och, bad luck to it, now I am infuriated—ragin'! But maybe small blame to me. For if I 'm no better than a murderin' brute itself, I was never that description of crawlin' bloodhound, anyway!'

'We wasn't sayin' it at all,' Dan declared. 'I do be tellin' them it 's only the illigant farmin' you have earns you the money.'

'Och, the money 's no throuble,' said the Crazy Farmer. 'The way of it was, when I come out of —out of a place I 'd been in, me poor father and me ould grandfather, and they all I had belongin' to me, was after dyin', and the bit of a farm come to me, away at Clonroe, where I wouldn't be stoppin'. So I set it to a man; and I seen the ould place above on a paper, and it I took. But the rint I git 's

somethin' over what I 'm payin', and plinty enough for all I want, along wid the pitaties. 'Deed, a body 's no call to be usin' much of anythin' when he 's mostly sittin' quiet indoors the way I am.'

'I 'd liefer be outside seein' things,' Dan said, looking about him.

'So would I,' said the Crazy Farmer.

'Then why to goodness don't you?' said Dan.

It was a brilliant midsummer evening, very slowly drawing towards sunset. The air was clear and soft after rain, and the sky's blue, deep-vaulted and glistering; wild-violet haze veiled the distant hills across the brown floor of the bog-land, but a nearer range showed broad belts of the apricot colour, mingled from blossoms golden and amethystine in myriads. Idle butterflies gleamed, wavering up and down, with no account to give of themselves, while bees in unseasonable velvet suits posted along very straight lines with a show of much alertness, only their hum betraying that they must be really half-asleep.

Through it all the rushing of the river ran, an age-long monotone, yet every minute full of fresh cadences; and a breeze had blown away the pungent reek of paraffin, to replace it with the odour of furze-blossom and pines and aromatic herbs.

The Crazy Farmer looked about him, too, wistfully and grudgingly. 'Five-and-twinty summers there 's been,' he said, 'wid a dale of plisant evenin's in them after work, and fine Sundays and holidays, and he knocked slap out of the whole of them, every single one, all of a minyit. It 's like as if I was after slammin' a black door in his face. And am I to be sittin'

in contintment, watchin' of the sunbames swimmin' over the width of the counthry, and the win' comin' by through the blades of grass? Let alone that I niver can tell but I might up and do as bad agin somebody else, if ever I got the chance. Keepin' me own door shut I 'd a right to be, and meself on the dark side of it.'

'Well, you are a quare one,' said Dan, who had stared and listened uncomprehendingly.

'I 'm steppin' back, now,' the Crazy Farmer said, rising, 'and it 's time you childer was gettin' home wid yourselves to wherever you come from. A good step it must be; and the fat little girl 's apt to do herself a mischief if she doesn't lave what 's left of the sugar.'

Moggy, who, during her elders' conversation, had been compressing handfuls of sugar into smooth lumps and furtively slipping them up her sleeve, looked in no way abashed. Her neighbours commonly said that there was as much villainy in her, little as she might be, as in the other two put together.

Then the Crazy Farmer collected the poor remnant of his wares in silence, and walked off without further speech. Dan watched the gaunt, ragged figure out of sight between the grey and rose-flushed tree-trunks, and turned away, saying, 'Bedad, it was too bad entirely.

'What was too bad?' asked Hughey.

'Och, nothin' that concerns you,' said Dan. 'I was only thinkin' I 'd forgot to ax the ould Crazy Farmer his name, after all.'

The young Mulcahys preferred not to mention

their meeting with the Crazy Farmer, partly because they were stringently forbidden the precincts of the Drimesk River, which is rightly considered a perilous stream, and partly because they felt that their dealings with his basket of provisions might not be approved by those in authority.

Norah Mulcahy never could account for the state of extraordinary stickiness in which her great-niece Moggy had returned home one evening; and on the next day she began to be also puzzled at a new form of troublesomeness developed by her great-nephew Dan. This was a persistent and importunate request for sixpence. What he wanted with it he would by no means disclose, but he begged and demanded and stormed and wheedled all through a long forenoon.

His great-aunt could not but demur; for her sixpences were so very few that to part with one was a serious matter, especially when she could not tell to what foolish purpose it might be applied. So at first she refused pointblank, and then put him off with conventionally evasive promises, such as that she would give him the next she found the old hen hatching, and the like. However, she gave in eventually, and regretfully fished half a dozen coppers out of her queer old purse. She 'hoped to goodness,' as she did so, 'that he wasn't going to be after any mischief with it'; but he vouchsafed no reassuring utterance upon this head.

The fact was that Dan's capricious conscience had been upbraiding him for his latest misdeed with quite unusual pertinacity ever since the moment when he had watched the Crazy Farmer trudge off between the fir-stems, bearing a rifled basket. A

recollection of the gaunt, ragged figure lingered in his mind, and was as hindering to the free play of his thoughts as stickiness would have been to his fingers. Most of us know how a little of that precludes any comfort in working, as effectually as would fetters and gyves.

Naturally, therefore, Dan grew impatient to rid himself of the encumbrance, and to restore some part, at least, of the plundered goods was the plan that occurred to him. It seemed to him that if he could produce a parcel of sugar in place of what Moggy had consumed, his fingers, metaphorically speaking, would be clear again. He had no scruples at all about methods of acquiring the means toward this end; and having successfully whined and teased, he appropriated the six pennies with much satisfaction and small thanks.

But he was delayed for a while by the wild wetness of that afternoon; and again on the morrow such a downpour overtook him on the road back from the shop, that his dumpy parcel narrowly escaped drowning, and had to be stowed away in a surreptitious cranny to wait for more favourable weather. It came with the third morning, which sparkled motelessly. Dan started early, finding himself called upon at the outset to suppress Moggy, who would have followed.

On this occasion, however, he at once adopted a firm tone. What he said exactly was: 'Quit botherin', or I 'll rowl you in that puddle! Who ate up all the man's bit of sugar?' This convinced her that she must be content to bide at home and solace herself with snubbing the baby, who did not mind. Although

Dan would have liked better to go alone, he could not so summarily reject the society of his brother Hughey, a less hampering companion ; and they took the river road together.

At all times the Drimesk River is a stirring and strenuous stream. If you dip a hand anywhere into the clear brown water, you feel the strong current grip and tug at it, in rough invitation to come bodily and rush rolling along. After a spell of 'soft' weather, it grows more turbulent and boisterous, and is liable to sudden seethings up of foamy white fury, as treacherous and startling almost as that of milk set on an overhot fire. To-day it was coming down in wide, loose waves, which nearly obliterated the boulders and kept the tallest sedges prostrate all along the banks, as if some very august procession were passing between them.

The aspect of the flood impressed and interested Hughey, but Dan was so full of his errand and so alive to the length of their walk, that he brooked no loitering, and replied only : 'Come on out of that!' when Hughey called his attention to swirling eddies or stranded masses of clotted froth.

It was indeed a very long walk. They had left far behind them the guilty place where the charred loaf still sat accusingly in the hollow, and they had followed the little rude foot-path into the fir coppice and out again, and on through the sombre folds of a bog and moorland, always close by the hurrying river, which alone made sound and motion under the broad sunshine, when just as Hughey was expressing a belief that 'the Crazy Farmer lived nowhere at all, and they had better be turning back,' they came in

sight of a thatched and whitewashed cabin on the other side of the stream.

Its walls were green with weather-stains and its thatch with weeds, but a blue smoke-tuft proved it inhabited. Three other cabins stood beside it, roofless, with skeleton rafters and empty doorways, having been deserted generations ago, at a time of famine and fever. A few hawthorn bushes straggled between it and the water, and a verdurous potato-patch was framed in the blazing gold of furze. No living thing appeared anywhere about, not so much as a chicken or a duck.

Dan's intention was to leave his parcel at the Crazy Farmer's door, but the river must first be crossed, and this looked just then a somewhat formidable step. A tree-trunk bridged it, bare and slippery, and ever and anon washed over by a foamy lip. There was, close at hand, a sharp bend of the river's bed, in which it tossed itself furiously, recoiling from rocky bank to bank, and darting out in a heavy, weltering ridge, that slid on and roared hollowly.

'Well, what are you stoppin' for?' Dan said sharply, to Hughey—which was unreasonable, as they had both come to a standstill at the near end of the bridge.

'I'm not stoppin' any more than yourself is, Hughey replied, with truth and asperity.

'Then git along over!'

'Git along yourself!' said Hughey. 'But I was thinkin' if it was me I'd be after just to lave the packet down here handy for him to be fetchin'. Or maybe take and sling it across over there. You could, aisy.'

'Och, yis, bedad, to be desthroyed wid the wet!' said Dan. 'That I 'm after givin' sixpence for at Crinion's. Of all the fools——'

'It 's a quare way the wather 's flouncin' along wid itself,' said Hughey. 'There, did you see the heft it gave th' ould trunk that time?'

'And what harm, supposin'? But of course if you 're frightened——' said Dan.

'Frightened yourself!'

'Bay-ab-by!' remarked Dan.

Certainly it was not a well-chosen place for a scuffle, but nobody could be expected to stand a trisyllabic baby, and Hughey thumped Dan. Next Dan kicked Hughey, who returned it; and then Dan gave Hughey a violent shove, which, his foot slipping on a wet stone, sent him headlong into the wild river.

A great wave that was wallowing by seemed to lap the boy up in its folds, and would have swept him very far away, had not the Crazy Farmer just then been passing with a load of turf. This he let drop, strewing about the black sods like a bundle of old shoes, and plunged in to the rescue.

A short, desperate struggle ensued, during which the Drimesk came very near getting the upper hand, but which ended in the Crazy Farmer's safe emergence with Hughey, limp and dripping. Dan, who had meanwhile danced in distraction on the perilous bridge, to the imminent probability of bringing on another accident, now rushed across, declaring with howls that 'It 's drownded he was entirely!'

'Sorra the drownd, glory be to goodness!' said the Crazy Farmer. 'It 's somethin' else I 'd have to

do besides fishin' drownded spalpeens out of the wather, where they might as well stop, if that was all. There 's plinty of divilment in him yit, plase the pigs; but it 's no thanks to you, sure enough, if that 's what you 're bawlin' for. Whisht, now, and be gatherin' up them few turf-sods for to put on the fire inside, till we get the crathur a trifle warm and dry.'

It was many a long year since the Crazy Farmer had spoken at such length. Dan obeyed his injunctions, relieved yet crestfallen. The expedition had been a signal failure. Fate seemed to have set her face firmly against his amends-making; for in the fray his parcel of sugar somehow had dropped irretrievably into the river, whose waters it had bootlessly sweetened instead of the Crazy Farmer's tea.

The small kitchen was very cavern-like and gloomy—blindingly so to anybody coming out of the strong sunshine. 'It looks to be a hijjus little hole,' Dan thought, peering through the dark, while the master of the house took steps to provide dry garments for Hughey. These consisted mainly of a tattered moleskin jacket and an old potato-sack, arrayed in which his aspect was that of a dwarf Bedouin as he sat on a creepy stool by the dim red hearth.

Then the Crazy Farmer seated himself on his bed close by, and meditatively said: 'He 's took no harm; only the pair of thim 's frightened out of their sivin sinses, and a good job, too, belike. It 's more raisonable they 're apt to be. But troth and bedad, if I 'd been a half-minyit later grabbin' a hold of him, it 's streelin' a mile down the river he 'd be afore now,

wid the breath choked out of his body. And then rememberin' the same the young chap might ha' been, that shoved him in, to the end of his life's days, that 's a long way off him yit.'

'I niver thought to be drowndin' of him at all, at all,' Dan averred, standing with one bare foot upon the other in an attitude of embarrassed dejection.

'And the Lord knows no more was I thinkin' to be doin' any such a thing—and I 'm thinkin' of it mostly ever since, a matter of five-and-twinty year,' said the Crazy Farmer. 'Ochone! but that sort of thinkin''s as little good for as the wet weather comin' at harvest when it was wantin' in the spring. And that sort you was widin the turn of a hand of a while ago, let me tell you, in your tantrums.'

'Are *you* after drowndin' somebody dead, then?' inquired Dan, whose curiosity was seldom long submerged.

'I had no talk of that. There 's plinty of ways besides drowndin' of doin' desthruction all of a minyit. But, bedad, 'twas a quare thing—just a crack on the head wid a bit of an ould holdfast!'

'Whose head,' said Dan, 'did you go for to crack?'

'Whisht-a-whisht!' the Crazy Farmer said. 'None that was any belongin' of yours. You 'd do better to be considerin' the way you come near desthroyin' the imp of a crathur there, that 's your own brother be the look of him. Howsoe'er, he 's none the worse this time.'

'You couldn't tell but I might ha' took me death of cowld,' said an aggrieved voice from Hughey's stool; and Hughey thereupon set up what he meant

for a portentous cough. But he failed to produce any sound more convincing than a queer, unnatural whoop; and the Crazy Farmer said, with some sternness: 'Now don't you be beginnin' that work, me man!' So Hughey made no further demonstrations of the kind.

'And what people's childer are yous at all?' their host asked, after a pause. 'They let you take fine long stravades about the counthry. Whatever brought you this far?'

'Dan Mulcahy I am,' Dan said. 'And so's me father. And he's workin' on the line down below.'

'Dan Mulcahy!' the Crazy Farmer said, sitting up straight with a start. '*Dan Mulcahy!* Saints above! Is it from Waterstrand your father come?'

'Ay, did he,' said Dan.

'Dan's son it would be, the eldest. And I declare, now, the spalpeens has a sort of a look—they have so! Tell me, lads, is your father a big man? Och, to be sure, I forgot. There's no use your tellin' me, when I haven't set eyes on him since he was about the size of yourselves. But do yous know e'er a girl be the name of Norah Mulcahy?'

'We do not,' said Hughey.

'There's me Aunt Norah,' said Dan, 'that's livin' wid us since me mother died.'

'A fine, tall girl,' said the Crazy Farmer, 'wid hair as black as that turf-sod?'

'She may be pretty middlin' tall,' said Dan, 'but her hair's near as white as yours.'

'Only her eyebrows,' said Hughey, 'is as black as if somebody'd wrote them wid the wrong end of a pen.'

'That's Norah, right enough,' said the Crazy Farmer, 'and I makin' sure in me mind it was dead or married she'd be in five-and-twinty year. But bedad it bates everythin' for quareness to think I'm just after hinderin' Dan's grandson of gettin' into the same throuble as meself! For so he would, if it wasn't for me comin' by. It's like as if I'd bided here on purpose all this while,' he said, happily unaware of what had actually brought them thither. 'Somethin' better I'll be feelin' in me mind be raison of that same. But I wonder what she'd say to it? Would she be thinkin' bad?'

He sat for a while considering deeply, with his head in his hands, and when his thoughts flowed back into speech, 'I dunno what to be at,' he said. 'Sometimes I do be thinkin' I've sted here long enough, and other times I do be thinkin' it's the only place for the likes of me. But maybe it's a bit diff'rint now. Yit if I got workin' among the other lads——'

'It looks an ugly, black little place to be stoppin' in a great while,' said Dan, whose iron hut, although nowise spacious, was fairly lightsome and airy.

But the Crazy Farmer thought aloud no more, till Hughey's clothes were dry. Then he escorted the two children safely across the subsiding river and started them homeward, with many warnings against fighting on the way. At the last moment he called Dan aside and gave him a message, repeating it impressively more than once, for his Aunt Norah.

'And if you'll bring me word what she says to-morra mornin',' said he, 'I'll be waitin' there at the

place where you found me ould basket sittin' the other day.'

Upon his return to Rosnalough, Dan delivered his message without delay. His great-aunt was washing his father's shirt and humming—Norah Mulcahy always was humming at her work a low, plaintive croon, as tuneless as the wind's among the sedges—when he came in and announced: 'So I did ax the Crazy Farmer his name.'

'You 're a very bould child,' Norah said, but diminished the effect of the rebuke by adding; 'and what is it at all?'

'He was axin' first about father's name and yours,' said Dan, 'and when I tould him, he lep out of his skin.'

'And sure what was our names to him,' said Norah.

'He bid me be tellin' you,' said Dan, 'himself was Dinny Loughlin, that done a bad job on you and yours one day in Henderson's shed. And that he 's remimberin' of it ever since, and livin' lonesome be raison of it, and begrudgin' himself the light of the sun over his head, that he put the other out of. And he bid me say he was just after doin' a better job, and would you think bad of him comin' back to thry could he git a bit of work anywheres, that 'ud pervint him of goin' deminted wid considerin' things. And I 'm to bring him word to-morra.'

'Dinny Loughlin!' his great-aunt said, with the same astonishment that the Crazy Farmer had shown. '*Dinny Loughlin!* Where is he, then? And what else did he tell you?'

'Nothin' else,' said Dan. 'What word will I be bringin' him?'

'Sure I must think and think, and I 'll tell you to-morra,' she said. And she thought and thought.

And next morning, which was very fine, she gave him a message and sent him off as early as she could. He heard her singing as he set out, and fancied it somehow sounded differently from usual, which was really the case. She was singing a tune.

The Crazy Farmer was waiting for him at the turn. He had broken up the charred loaf, and arranged the crumbs in fantastic patterns on the top of the bank without knowing what his fingers were doing.

Dan delivered Norah Mulcahy's word with the fidelity of a Homeric messenger: 'She says that if you took her advice it 's comin' along you 'd be to your ould frinds, that 's as glad as anythin' to git news of you. And be considerin' things raisonable. And not be frettin' in distraction about them that 's belike a dale better off than e'er a one of us; and you intendin' them no harm. And you could aisy be gittin' a job on the line where her nephew 's workin'—that 's me father.'

'And bedad I will so!' Dinny Loughlin said, standing up. 'Glory be to goodness, I 'm a strong man yit! I 'll come back to me work and me ould frinds.'

A CHRISTMAS DOLE

BETWEEN Julia Doherty and her fellow-servant, Rebecca Moriarty, relations had been more or less strained for the past three years, but this state of things still seemed to them a disagreeable innovation, because they had lived together in amity for at least ten times as long. During that period they had witnessed jointly and shared many vicissitudes, the main outcome of which had been the dwindling away of the establishment at Lisnafrenagh House, where themselves with their old Miss Valance now seemed a very much shrivelled kernel in a weather-beaten nut. The shell was indeed all worn and battered. Red rust lay almost as thick on the whorls of the tall entrance-gates as green moss in the crevices of their granite piers; and the ornate lodge at the left hand was so obviously a ruin that nobody could think of calling for anybody to come out of it and open them. One of the small side-gates, however, had fallen off its hinges, and made ingress easy for foot-passengers. So Dr. Furlong there left his car one dingy morning a few days before Christmas, and began to walk up the weedy avenue. His approach could be watched all the way from the upper stories of the house, which crowns a short slope, and it was in fact at once descried by

Rebecca and Julia, cleaning windows in the front chintz room. Julia was a tall, gaunt person, to whose long face straight black eyebrows and a jaw slightly underhung gave a resolute expression, which sometimes proved misleading. A heavy, grey shawl enfolded her, and she wore a black bonnet over bands of frosted, dark hair. Rebecca, in her cold-looking, bluish print gown, was a rather dumpy figure, and her face was plump, though its features were sharp and fine. Her sleek, flaxen hair, uncovered by a cap, was less bleached than faded.

'There 's a car stopped at us below,' said Rebecca. 'Dan Corish's it looks to be, and the doctor 's on it belike. Ay, sure enough, whoever it is he 's steppin' up. I 'm glad now he come so early. I scarce thought he would for such a thrifle.'

'I 'm glad,' assented Julia; but her tone expressed a somewhat doubtful joy. 'To be sure he knows well enough he 's a right to not be delayin' when he 's called in to an ould body like the Misthress, that might drop down any minyit,' she added more cheerfully.

'It was a good job, too, her gettin' the weeny touch of rheumatics,' said Rebecca. 'If it wasn't only for that we 'd never have had her persuaded to see him. And why would she? and she so finely and strong in herself, and no more than the age of other people.'

I don't see any great signs of stren'th on her, then,' said Julia. 'Failin' she is every day of her life, in my humble judgment.'

'And, bedad, it 's the quare things,' Rebecca said,

'some folks wouldn't see, if they had as many eyes as a paycock.'

'They would not, thrue for you,' Julia said, making an application of her own.

'You 'll be takin' off of *them*, anyway, I should suppose,' Rebecca said, suggestively rather than conjecturally, referring to Julia's out-of-door garb.

'That 's accordin' as may happen,' said Julia; 'I might as like as not have to be runnin' out.'

'To fetch liniment or such—oh, like enough,' said Rebecca.

'Plinty besides liniment I may be fetchin',' Julia said meaningly.

'And makin' a laughin'-stock of the Family through the parish,' Rebecca said bitterly. ''Twould be a pity you weren't ready time enough for that.'

'What talk at all of the Family have you?' said Julia. 'Isn't she all the Family there 's in it? And where 'd it be if she took her death frettin'?'

'Frettin' 's a quare long road for a body to be gettin' at her death by,' said Rebecca. 'And if she 's all that 's left, it 's only the more raison for not lettin' her make a show of herself.'

'I haven't the heart to go disappoint her, and it may be the last Christmas she 'll have in th' ould place,' said Julia. 'That 's what I 'm always thinkin'.'

'Once in a way 'ud be often enough, for any sinse there was in it,' said Rebecca. 'But whether or no' if it hadn't mishappint I was laid up with that maledicted ould influenza this time three year, ne'er a chance you 'd have had, let me tell you, of takin' up wid playin' any such fool's tricks.'

Midway in these last remarks, Julia had begun to polish a pane so energetically that the rattling of the loose window-frame might have been supposed to prevent them from reaching her ears, and she availed herself of the possibility to avoid making any reply.

'Ashamed of me life I 've often been to be showin' me face in the chapel,' Rebecca resumed, when the clatter had ceased. 'And if it was to happen again, faix, I might as well turn haythen Turk all out. To think of that mane work, after all the Family done in the days of ould.'

'Ay, indeed; the Valances were always great benefactors,' said Julia. 'And the poor misthress is a rael charitable lady in her heart. Sure, that 's why she 's so set her mind on keepin' up the Dole.'

'There 's a dale of pride and conthrariness in some people's charity,' said Rebecca. 'Thick wid them it is as a spoonful of jam wid wasps and flies out of a pot you 've left uncovered all the summer on the dresser.'

Julia's reply to this was not less evasive than her window-rattling had been. 'He 'll be nigh the hall-door by now,' she said, peering out. 'Yes, bedad; there is he passin' the clump of junipers. Saints above, but he 's quare and young-lookin'. Poor Dr. Carter's great-grandson he might be, for any age that 's on him.'

'And all the betther,' said Rebecca; 'he 'll ha' had so much the less time to be forgettin' his college larnin', and takin' foolish notions into his head wid listenin' to the poor people talkin' nonsensical.'

'Thim that are so young do mostly have plinty of

nonsensical notions in their heads widout throublin' thimselves to be listenin'—that's my experience,' said Julia.

Well, mind you, young or no, you've undertook to go by what he says,' Rebecca said, looking sternly at her. 'If he's of the opinion there's not much ailin' her, you'll quit humourin' her that way. It's a promise.'

'Ay is it,' said Julia, 'and a safe one, if he's as much wit as a four-year-old. We'd a right to be steppin' down and lettin' him in. Sure enough I'll go by what he says.'

So a short light-blue figure, and a tall greyish one, were waiting to receive Dr. Furlong as he crossed the wide gravel sweep, paved here and there with sodden leaves in fantastic inlaid patterns. The house which fronted him was a three-storied, basemented, stone building, with wings longer and lower. Its porched hall-door opened on a semi-circle of broken steps; upon the roof-gable, immediately above it, a large ecstatic sculpture, Bacchante or Victory, seemed to dance in mockery of the surrounding decay. Dr. Furlong, young and brisk, was ushered by the two old women solemnly into a dark dismantled-looking hall, and up wide resonant stairs. 'This damp weather has affected your mistress, no doubt,' he said to them on the way up. But one replied, shaking her bonneted head, 'We'll lave it to you, sir'; and her companion said, 'I'm sayin' nothin' one way or the other.' After which he desisted from further attempts at conversation.

When he had emerged from his interview with Miss Valance, however, he found them both lying

in wait for him at the head of the first flight of stairs, under the big round-topped stained-glass window. Intense anxiety was stamped on their faces, and the doctor good-naturedly hastened to relieve it by saying cheerfully, 'Well, I 'm glad to find that there 's not much amiss here. Miss Valance is merely suffering from a slight touch of muscular rheumatism in the elbow, and should keep herself warm and out of draughts. But, indeed, as she tells me that she never leaves those rooms, she runs little risk of taking cold. It 's a pity, though, that she should shut herself up in such a way.'

'Well, now, glory be to goodness, for that hearin',' said Rebecca. 'And what was I tired tellin' you, Julia?'

But the long face in the black bonnet had lengthened at this verdict; and Julia said to the doctor: 'Yet it 's rael wakely she is, at all events; cruel faible and failed-like to what she was. 'Twouldn't take more than a little to make an end of her altogether.'

'Really, I don't think that is the case at all,' said Dr. Furlong, still wishing to reassure. 'Of course, at her advanced age—over eighty, she tells me—we must expect some diminution of strength, but I should say she was in a fairly vigorous state.'

'And you 've promised faithful to go by what he 'd say, Julia,' exulted Rebecca.

To which Julia only responded under her breath: 'Och, the crathur, the crathur!'

Dr. Furlong began to feel that he did not quite understand the situation. 'I 'll send a bottle of lotion, and I 'll look in and see how she is in two or

three days,' he said. 'I expect I shall find her well mended, as they say up in Donegal.'

'You couldn't tell, sir,' said Julia; 'but if she was thwarted any way, or hindered of what she was used to——'

'Whist now wid that,' Rebecca interrupted in a peremptory whisper. 'You've no call to be puttin' your own notions in his head. 'Tisn't them we'll be mindin'.'

During even his short practice, Dr. Furlong had become too familiar with the symptoms of domestic discords to lay much stress upon them, or to observe them with much curiosity; besides, his car was waiting. So he said: 'Well, good-morning! I'll send the lotion'; and he had his foot on the stair, when a casual thought turned him round: 'By the way,' he said, 'that's an uncommonly fine dog you have. But what breed is he? He might be a deerhound from his build, but his coat and colour are like a Great Dane. Is he——' he stopped suddenly, because one old woman crossed herself, and the other said with widening eyes: '*The dog?*'

'Yes, a great, shaggy, white and fawn-coloured fellow,' said Dr. Furlong. 'He met me just now outside your mistress's door, and wanted me to let him in; but I didn't know whether that was permissible, especially as he was dripping wet—seemed to have been taking a bath. I left him whining and scratching, and then he came after me a bit downstairs, till he ran off into the little dark passage on the right—he nearly filled it up. I never saw such a giant.'

'You've seen what shouldn't be seen by man or

baste in this house,' said Rebecca; and Julia said groaningly, 'Up at her very door—the saints be good to her!'—remarks which seemed to the doctor little to the purpose, so he nodded farewell and ran downstairs.

As the sound of his steps receded, Rebecca composed her countenance and said with some tartness to Julia, who was continuing to ejaculate, 'Och, what ould yawpin' have you? Where 's the wit of keepin' on like th' ould weather-cock craikin' round?'

'For the matter of that,' retorted Julia, 'yourself's lookin' this minyit as if you was after wipin' your face wid a floury apern.'

'Anybody might be a thrifle took aback just at hearin' it suddint,' said Rebecca; 'but that's all I was. 'Tisn't the first time such a thing was heard tell of here.'

''Twould be the first time if black harm wasn't comin' of it,' said Julia. 'Och! and she the last of thim all; may goodness pity us!'

'You 'd do a dale better to be takin' off of thim things, and comin' down to fetch her up her cup of beef-tay, and it past twelve o'clock, instead of keenin' there like a desolit banshee; it might be about nothin' after all,' said Rebecca.

'Sure I 'm runnin' out this instant,' said Julia.

'And what for, then?' said Rebecca.

'To bid the people be steppin' up on Christmas Eve,' Julia said, as much as possible as if mentioning a matter of course.

'Is it for that same ould nonsense and blathers you 'd be bringin' them?' Rebecca said, with wrath and surprise unfeigned and feigned.

'Bedad am I, what else?' Julia said, in like manner.

'God forgive you, woman!' Rebecca stormed; 'and you promised faithful to go by whatever the doctor would be sayin'.'

'And what else at all am I goin' by?' said Julia.

'Didn't he say as plain as he could spake there was next to nothin' ailin' her?' demanded Rebecca.

'Is it plain?' said Julia; 'and could he spake plainer than tellin' of seein' the sign? 'Twould ha' been all one if he'd said she wouldn't over the New Year.'

'So then you'd have her fooled and chaited in the last days of her life?' Rebecca said, shifting her ground.

'Liefer would I than for to have her vexed,' said Julia, drawing her shawl about her shoulders. 'And when she's gone, it's little I'll throuble meself to mind what any people thinks.'

Rebecca, pausing, seemed to cast about for an argument against this recklessness, but apparently with small result.

'Whose bonnet is that you're wearin' of, I'd be glad to know?' she called at the last moment, as Julia was beginning to stump down. 'It's long before I'd ever ha' loaned you it if——'

Julia wheeled about disdainfully: 'Och! if that's all,' she said, and began to fumble at the strings.

'Mercy on us, woman,' Rebecca cried, more than ever aghast, 'you're not runnin' out on the road in your bare head, makin' a show of us?'

But Julia had already flung the black bonnet on to the window-seat, where it alighted with ribbons

widely streaming. Then as she swooped downstairs, she lifted her dark shawl over her head with a flapping spread of her arms, so that her departure was somewhat like the flight out of the house of a large black bird. Rebecca stood in consternation for a few moments, till with a start she glanced behind her, wavered affrightedly, and ran desperately upstairs. She thought she had heard the padding of great paws.

Towards dusk, on the sleety Christmas Eve, Dr. Furlong was again walking up to the front door of Lisnafrenagh House, and 'There 's one of those queer old women,' he said to himself, recognising under the porch a capacious black bonnet. On this occasion it contained, however, the sleek, faded hair-loops of Rebecca Moriarty. She wore over her blue print a little knitted shawl of flimsy texture, but an inadequate wrap against the bleak gusts and cold drops slanting in between the pillars. When the doctor inquired for her mistress she replied: 'I 've quit Miss Valance's service; but she 's above. The other woman can be showin' her to you.'

'Perhaps I 'd better ring,' said he, and he pulled a dangling bell-handle. At this moment two old black-cloaked crones came up, and he stood aside to let them pass. They walked in at the door, which they left ajar, and through it came a sound of many voices in the hall. One of these, manly and gruff, was just then remarking: 'If I 'd ha' thought we 'd be kep' waitin' that long, I 'd ha' waited a while longer meself before I come away from me bit of thatchin'.'

'Whethen now, Joe M'Quaile,' a shriller voice said, 'you might be talkin', if you was after thrampin' betther than two mile thro' the mud of the roads, that 's liker ditch-bottoms, to be fetchin' home nothin' at all. 'Deed, if it wasn't only for Julia Doherty, that 's a dacint poor crathur, sornin' and enthraitin' to me, sorra a fut of me 'd be in it.'

'Sure it hasn't the look of a place you 'd be fetchin' anythin' out of,' said a third voice. 'The ould walls is as bare as the floor, and there 's scarce e'er a chair standin' on it. Stone-broke they are, whatever she may let on.'

'Me pair of blankets I 'm come for, and me poun' of tay, and me half-a-crown,' said a quavering treble very hopefully. 'And may God lave the Valances their health!'

'Take care, Widdy, it 's not inthrest they'll be axin' you for the loan of the bit of silver,' said the gruff voice. 'Quare ways the Valances have these times intirely.'

'There 's not been an ounce of buttcher's mate ordered up here in the last twelvemonth,' said a woman's voice. 'Warden was sayin' he supposed they 'd be roastin' of a wood quest for th' ould lady's dinner on Christmas Day.' And then several laughed and talked at once.

'Thim 's the sort she has in it passin' remarks on the Family,' Rebecca said, turning to the doctor a face full of fierce bitterness. 'Begorrah, if I had the hangin' alive of that Julia Doherty!' Then she put her head in at the half-open door, and called: 'Bad manners to the whole of you for a good-for-nothin' thankless pack.'

An abrupt silence followed this criticism; and Rebecca, turning away down the steps, said to Dr. Furlong as she passed: 'The bell-wire's broke this twinty year. You 'd a right to walk straight up.'

After doubting for a moment whether to do so, he entered the darkling hall, where were grouped some dozen or more of poor folk, chiefly women; all of them—so recent in date was his appointment to Lisnafrenagh Dispensary—still strangers to him. He passed through them and upstairs, till on the first landing he came to an open door made conspicuous by a dim illumination. It belonged to the library, a narrow slip of a brown room, which gave one the impression that everything wanted to be re-bound. Looking in from the threshold, Dr. Furlong found his view limited by a wide leathern folding-screen, set near this end of the room, which it blocked up thoroughly. At one corner of it old Julia Doherty, flushed and dishevelled, was tugging violently. 'Och, sir, wud you come and lend me your assistance to straighten out this flap of it?' she called hurriedly, as she caught sight of the doctor. He did as requested, and helped her to extend the heavy leaf with its dainty Watteau-like groups, powdered ladies pink and white, in wide-dispread azure and peach-colour, gentlemen no less brilliant, but more succinct in drapery. The screen was placed behind a massive square-backed arm-chair, beside which stood a small spindle-legged table, with a pair of long candles burning on it to eke out the ebbing daylight, now almost swamped by the portentous gloom of an imminent hail-shower.

'I beg your pardon, sir, for makin' so free,' Julia said, panting. 'But the misthress might be down directly, and I 'm that put about wid one thing and another. And Rebecca Moriarty 's took upon herself to flounce off, and left me widout e'er a body to do a hand's turn.'

'I believe I met her at the door,' said Dr. Furlong.

'Ay, would you. Away is she to stop wid the Langans at the ould back lodge. Quit after five-and-thirty year, and all because I wouldn't be tormintin' and thwartin' of the poor misthress that's took for her death.'

'My goodness!' said the doctor. 'Is Miss Valance worse?'

'Oh, *you 'd* stand me out there was nothin' ailin' her,' Julia said upbraidingly, 'and you after seein' the sign yourself. But for the matter of that, ne'er a medical man among you all 'ud know an atom betther. It 's ignorant they are. Howsomever, 'twould be a cruel pity to go annoy her, the crathur, the last Christmas she 'll put in wid us; and the Blankit-dole was always what she took a quare surprisin' plisure in. So about play-actin' it agin we are—if Rebecca was twice as cross.'

'Play-acting?' said Dr. Furlong.

'A pair of blankits,' said Julia, 'and a pound of tay, and a half-crown—that 's what four-and-twinty poor people out of this parish 'ud be getting up here every Christmas Eve time out of mind. And the misthress herself disthributin' the gifts to aich one of them here in the book-room, and she sittin' queenly there in the big chair. But upon me word,

sir, it cost a powerful sight of money. There was three pounds wint in the half-crowns alone; and the tay 'ud come to maybe half as much agin—tay 's chapened these times—and the blankits were a terrible price, terrible. 'Twouldn't be much short of a dozen guineas altogether. So when the Family got ruinated a while back, how would she be affordin' it at all? And she all the while, mind you, never thinkin' of anythin' bein' diff'rint to what they was used to, and considherin' belike the bills got ped as natural as the laves come out on the trees, just a while sooner or later, accordin' as may happen. But it's fairly distracted I was, schemin' and conthrivin', till this time three year I made up a sort of plan in me mind how to manage rightly. See here, sir.'

She twitched the doctor by the sleeve toward a little round table in an obscure nook behind the screen. On it stood a dark-purple grocer's parcel, with a silver coin stuck in the twine, and a white soft-looking bundle, which displayed a border of shaded brown.

'I made a shift,' she said, 'to get the one pair of blankits—I couldn't tell you the shillin's they stood me in—and the pound of tay, and the half-crown. And then I wint round to the people, and I explained to them the way it was wid the Family, and that the misthress couldn't be annoyed about it, and what themselves had a right to do. So now there she does be sittin' in the big chair, wid the ould foldin'-screen behind her to keep off draughts, for 'fraid she might notice anythin'; and here I have the pair of blankits and all convenient to hand

to her. And in comes, maybe, Pather Connolly, or Biddy Lynch, or the Widdy Kilkelly, and up to the front of the chair he steps, and makes his best bow, or drops her curtsey accordin'. And the misthress gives him the bundle I 'm after handin' her—sure she 'd never think to ax where it come from, no more than if it was a cloud out of the sky—and then it 's "Long life to your ladyship," and "Heaven be your bed," and 'You 're very welcome, Pather,' and this way and that way, and off wid him round the screen. But at the back of it here, out of sight, sure he just hands what she gave him over to me agin, the way we 'd have it ready for the next body come, same as if we had ones a-piece for them all, and no throuble whate'er.'

'Oh! I see,' said Dr. Furlong. 'Then this blanket 's doing duty for the third year.'

'Troth is it,' Julia said, patting it with a sort of furtive pride, 'and nobody could tell but it was fresh out of the shop. I folded it other side out this mornin', and gave it a tie wid a new bit of the pink tape. "Have they sent the blankits of a good quality, Julia?" sez the misthress to me only yesterday. "Illigant, ma'am," sez I; "the very same as last year." And it 's the identical half-crown, too. But the packet of tay 's new,' she explained regretfully, 'for that omadhawn Thady Gahan last year let it fall, and burst the bottom out of it. Be good luck there was nobody to come after him. But I thought Judy Molloy had us desthroyed; for she come one of the first, and if she did, she took and dhropped the half-crown, that rowled itself into a crevice near the door—and sorra another one in the house I well

knew—only John Egan roked it out wid his stick. It 's a good plan, bedad.'

'Well, it 's ingenious, no doubt,' said Dr. Furlong; 'but it seems rather hard on the people.'

'Oh, *thim*,' said Julia, 'set thim up; it 's the laist they may do for the poor misthress. And willin' and raisonable enough they mostly are, I 'll say that for them. It 's only Rebecca Moriarty does be cross, and talkin' quare about the Family, as if I 'd be doin' anythin' agin it. 'Tis the best plan at all.'

'I suppose you must go through with it now, at any rate,' said the doctor, 'and the sooner the better, for the people in the hall seem to be getting a little impatient.'

'I 'm only waitin' now for the misthress to be callin' them up,' said Julia. 'She 'll be here directly. 'Twas Rebecca's fantigues delayed us. But there 's one thing, sir, I 'm a thrifle onaisy about. It 's the Widdy Langan from th' ould back lodge has come up wid herself; I heard her voice below. And she 's a little ould ancient body, not over sinsible in her mind. Apt she might be to get risin' a disturbance on us, if she 's axed to give up the blankit, not rightly understandin'; and then I dunno what 'ud happen at all at all. Musha, good gracious! here 's the misthress herself'—a door at the other end of the room was opening. ''Twould be a rael charity, now, sir, if you 'd keep an eye on th' ould body,' Julia said in a flurry, 'and purvint her by any manes of comin' up wid the first; 'twouldn't matter as much if she was nigh the ind of thim.'

'All right,' Dr. Furlong said, and he took up a position near the door, though he was puzzled to know how he could carry out these instructions.

Meanwhile, tall and thin Miss Valance, whose high-capped grizzled head looked the gaunter because it rose from among the softness of a fleecy white shawl, settled herself in the big square-outlined chair, shaking out the somewhat skimpy folds of a black satin skirt, which the shivering candlelight burnished gloomily; and Julia, going to the head of the stairs, called down them: 'Come along up wid yous out of that, aisy and quiet.'

A loud clumping on the stairs, mixed with the flip-flap of bare feet, followed this injunction immediately, as if put in motion by a spring; and presently the procession came filing in, mostly old women and men. Dr. Furlong watched the proceedings from a corner near the door. They seemed to be carried on with no serious hitch. The presentations were made with all due forms and ceremonies, and the gifts were promptly surrendered by each recipient in turn to Julia, ambushed behind the scenes. Dinny Blake did make some sportive feints of being about to pocket the half-crown, but desisted at once upon Julia's passionately-whispered appeal to him to 'behave himself like a dacint Christian'; and though she fidgeted uneasily through Miss Valance's exhortations to Joe Rea on the inadvisability of parting with any of his coin at M'Evoy's, the irony in his undertaking to 'ait ivery pinny of it that he spint on drink' was quite unsuspected by the

person addressed. Nor was there perceptible any false ring in Bridget Toler's fervent promise to 'be prayin' for all the Valances every night of her life as long as she had a thraneen of thim illigant blankits above her.'

These things were interesting Dr. Furlong when he was tardily reminded of his special commission by the sight of a small old wizened woman pushing her way eagerly to the front, amid encouragement from the bystanders, who bade her 'come along wid herself,' and one another 'be lettin' the Widdy Langan pass.' He hastily tried to interpose with some retarding suggestions, but it was too late, and she slipped by him at a tottering trot, in her ancestral hooded cloak, so much too ample for her that whenever she stood still it made a black frill round her on the floor, towards which it seemed to be dragging her down. Julia thus had no alternative but to hand her mistress the Widdy's bundle, but as she did so she made signals of distress to the doctor, seeming to implore his aid in counteracting the evil effects of its bestowal.

Accordingly, when the little Widdy reappeared behind the screen, gleefully hugging her parcels, she was met by two people, who were cruelly bent on inducing her to part from her newly-acquired prize. Such a proposal very sadly shocked and grieved the Widdy; nor could arguments, explanations, cajoleries, and promises aught avail to recommend it. They were all responded to by plaintive 'Ah, no's!' growing shriller and more querulous with each reiteration, until at last another voice, also high-pitched and quavering, called impatiently to

inquire why nobody came; whereupon Julia, with a distracted mien, ran round the screen to account for the delay as plausibly as she could. To Dr. Furlong the case had assumed a very hopeless complexion, when an ally joined him in the person of one Mrs. M'Ateere, the little Widdy's good-natured and portly niece, whose coaxing and *sluthering*, reinforced by a couple of the doctor's not over-abundant florins, at length detached the lingering grasp lothfully from the property bundle. Yet even then she tottered away so evidently so very much less than half consoled, that he felt inhuman and remorseful as he sped to Julia with his spoil.

In the act of delivering it to her he started violently, and all but let it drop; the cause, his having suddenly become aware, with an unaccountable degree of astonishment, that the big white and fawn-coloured dog was in the room. The beast was lying close to Miss Valance's feet, conspicuous even in that dim light against her dark gown, stretched lazily, with his heavy forepaws crossed, and his wide red mouth open.

'What is it, sir?' Julia asked.

'Oh, nothing,' he answered, 'only I hadn't noticed that the dog was there.'

Julia flung up her hands. 'The saints be good to us!—the dog!—where is it at all?'

But at this moment Miss Valance rose up stiffly and feebly. 'I think, Julia,' she said, 'I'll now leave the rest of the distribution to you.'

'Is there anythin' ailin' you, Miss Nellie?' Julia said, hurrying over to her. 'Aren't you feelin' so well in yourself, ma'am dear?'

'Perfectly,' replied Miss Valance. 'But I'm rather tired, and my feet are cold, and I feel a chilly draught—it comes from the door, I think. Look how the lights are flickering: one can hardly see. I'm afraid to sit here any longer, so I'll make an end, and depart.'

In the dimness she did not observe Dr. Furlong's presence, and she moved slowly down the room towards the door at the opposite end, Julia going with her. The doctor at first saw the great shaggy beast following close behind the two old women; but about half-way he seemed to disappear among the many shadows. From the other direction came the sounds of the people descending the stairs. All around the wind was moaning and howling, as it drove fitful showers against the windows, sometimes with the clattering slash of hail, and sometimes with sleet in broad half-melted flakes, that came on the swimming panes like the padding of large soft paws.

Early on the next morning, which was wild and wet, Dr. Furlong found himself again alighting at the gates of Lisnafrenagh. He had had an urgent call in that direction, and took the opportunity of leaving at the old back-lodge some tea and a roll of resplendent scarlet flannel for the Widdy Langan, as spells by which he hoped to lay the haunting reminiscence of her little wizened face, all foolish and woebegone.

Dan Crilly, the driver, had been explaining to him, on the way, his shortest route to the lodge,

through the tangled shrubbery paths: 'And then, after passin' th' ould shell-house, take the turn to the right; the other 'ud bring you to the bit of a little lough lyin' just outside of the demesne, that they have the quare story about.'

'What's that?' asked the doctor.

'Sure I dunno rightly,' said Dan; 'some ugly black work, be all accounts. The Family had some young fellow drowned in it, I've heard tell. But 'twas ould ages ago.'

Not a soul did Dr. Furlong meet in the dripping overgrown shrubberies, until just at the round dilapidated arbour he saw pacing towards him the huge white dog, who stopped ever and anon to shake his shaggy coat. So narrow was the path that it seemed as if they would have hardly room to pass each other; however, before they met, the beast turned down the walk to the left, towards the ill-reputed lough. When Dr. Furlong knocked at the door of the lodge close by, a cabin smothered in sombre shrubs, it was opened at once by Rebecca Moriarty, but instead of greeting him she stood staring over his shoulders as if some other object absorbed all her attention. He faced about, and saw Julia Doherty speeding down the path, bare-headed beneath the wet and wind-tossed boughs, with her arms full of an overflowing white bundle. It was the pair of blankets, which had slipped out of their fastenings, and hung about in loosely gathered-up folds. These she thrust upon Rebecca. 'Widdy Langan may be havin' them now,' she said; 'there'll be no more givin' away up at Lisnafrenagh.' With that she was rushing off again, when Rebecca

caught her by the shawl. 'What at all is it, woman?' she said; 'sure to goodness nothin''s took ——' But Julia pulled herself free, still keeping her face set to the grey quivering rain-strands, and the keening gusts that carried away her words. 'All alone wid herself,' she said; 'ne'er a hand's turn to do for her. Ah! poor Miss Nellie, the crathur, the crathur! There'll be nobody up at the House —nobody any more!'

A WEDDING-GOWN

I

BARAVON HOUSE crests, with its many gables and chimney-stacks, a green slope at the foot of which the Avonbawn River flees by. The Avonbawn always runs in haste here, its waters not yet having unlearned the habit contracted when descending some very steep mountain-paths. Even in the least rainy weather, the boulders that roughen its course through this little glen are kept incessantly weaving white foam-fabrics. These are sometimes folded into snowy bundles, and stored away for a while behind rock-ledges, or in shelving hollows under the banks; but, as a rule, they are carried off straight from the loom, and swept down the stream, which they robe with long, trailing vestments of lace and lawn, and diaphanous veils, flowing and floating fairily fine. In wetter seasons, when all the hills are veined with milky torrents, and the far-gleaming streak of the waterfall hung up high on Slieve Crievan spreads out over the cliff's face like a great white hand, the Avonbawn comes past in fury, and smothers the boulders under one blanched sheet. At such times the water's tossing rim laps up to the flower-beds which Madame Delaney had set at a

discreet height above the margin long ago; and then daffodils and valley-lilies, foxgloves and irises, bluebells and snowdrops and crocuses, may be washed from their root-hold and drowned. Still, clumps of them continue to flourish, despite inundations, up and down among the trees that climb the slope to the sombre girdle of a tall yew-hedge. This hedge is the wall of the Baravon garden-pleasaunce, and arches cut in it let out glimpses of jewel-bright sward and blossom. Across the river rises another bank, so thickly clothed with firs that the small church on top of it shows only an ivy-todded tower above them. A solidly-built stone foot-bridge makes a way to and fro, joining two winding paths. About its piers the foam gathers into deep, fleecy mats.

Within the massive hedge you come on a flowery lawn, sloping up to a level space round the house, one wing of which looks into it with wide, low windows and a porched door. There are arbours and fountains in it, terraces and pleached alleys, a rosary, and a sun-dial; in fact, all the features of a garden except two: gravelled walks, namely, and earthen flower-beds. For Madame Delaney, who laid it out originally, had declared that she would have nothing ugly in her garden, and that ugly she considered gravel and brown mould to be. Furthermore, she said that wherever there was gravel there was also sure to be somebody scraping it up with a rake, and setting all your teeth on edge, which made her doubly determined to have none of it about the place. Madame Delaney was a spoilt only heiress, and a richly-dowered wife, so that her wishes were generally carried out, and her plants had to thrive on

a grassy carpet, while her walks were softly green, and often, it must be owned, wet under foot. When she left them, long since, her successors kept them in the same state, and she would have found few changes to chide if she had revisited her ancient haunts, as she is, indeed, reported to do 'of an odd time,' in the gathering dusk or glimmering moonlight.

In course of years, Baravon House and demesne became the property of some Barrys, a younger branch of the Ballyduff family, and then it remained unoccupied for a decade and more, as its new owners lived abroad. That is to say, it was not left quite uninhabited, but the presence of a caretaker merely could not hinder it from being considered vacant from a social point of view. The caretaker was Mrs. Margaret Lonergan, a widow, who before her marriage, somewhat late in life, had spent many years in the service of the Barrys. Her position had been one of trust, and the Family had held her in high esteem; consequently when she was thrown on the world with two little girls to provide for, it seemed a piece of good luck from every point of view that Baravon House should just then have required a caretaker. So she took up her residence there with Maggie and Isabella. Under ordinary circumstances she would have been assigned lodgings in the kitchen regions, and would have visited the more ornamental parts of the mansion only for occasional dustings and airings; but Mrs. Lonergan, as a privileged person, was allowed to take possession of rooms in the garden wing, very comfortable, indeed luxurious quarters; and she had a stipend correspondingly liberal.

Thus it happened that little Isabella Lonergan, who was not three years old when she came to Baravon, had no recollections of any rougher mode of life than she found there. It would have been impossible for her to imagine the conditions of existence in the little houses from which her parents, the smallest of small farming folk, had come. Nothing of the sort had ever been brought within the range of her experience. Her mother herself had quitted them early for a long domicile in a very big house, and her brief return to them during her married life had been a period of such unhappiness that it was hidden away in silence. All her reminiscences were of Hanramoyne Castle, and old Lady Dormer, and Sir Gerald, and Miss Frances, and Miss Isabella, with a setting of what her humbler neighbours would have called 'all manner of grandeur'; which gave little Isabella an impression that they themselves must, if anything, have rather come down in the world. However, she was on the whole well content with her position in it, as she had good reason to be. The largest hole that could have been picked in the pleasantness of her life was its dearth of companions. They had no near neighbours, and Mrs. Lonergan preferred that the others should continue to be distant in every sense of the word. And a childless, fairly prosperous brother in Bantry had offered a home to Maggie soon after her father's death, with prospects of schooling and a legacy—a proposal too advantageous to be declined. Maggie, therefore, had departed, and Isabella was thenceforward practically without any society except her mother's. But it is probable that she gained as much as she lost by this

deprivation, which shielded her from many uncongenial circumstances, and gave her scope for enjoying to the full all the pleasant things within her reach. They were of just the kind that she was born to appreciate, having inherited from her mother the disposition and tastes which had made everybody feel surprised at Margaret Hanlon in her staid middle-age incongruously choosing to take up with Dinis Lonergan, a good-looking, riotous scamp of an army-pensioner. Isabella was as quiet and gentle as her mother had ever been, but dreamier and more unenergetic ; she took as keen a delight in nature and art, with a super-added fastidiousness, which, amid less felicitous surroundings, would have been a source of misery, but which here only heightened her pleasure in the many-hued fragrant garden and the many-voiced foaming river, and the still shadow of the pine-groves. The long, brown, leather-scented library gave her access at all seasons to the blissful world which countless people find a haven of refuge, but which was to her seldom otherwise than an enjoyable port of call on a voyage among fortunate isles. Her mother idolised her, and was more often than not employed in working deftly for the adornment of a beauty which she did not err in considering rare and delicate. The M'Cabes, father and son, who were responsible for most of the gardening, had from her first arrival called the sedately proud and serenely gracious baby-girl Her Ladyship and Milady, titles which they never dropped, only using them with more deference as time went on. They addressed Mrs. Lonergan as ma'am, and the distinction seemed to every one quite appropriate. Milady

never was called upon to do anything; but if she liked to help her mother with dusting books and china, or a bit of fine needlework, or to gather flowers, and pick fruits when jam was making, she had the occupation ready to hand; and it sometimes helped to speed the hours on their way. So her leisurely years sauntered by, too youthful to go fast, and too happy to seem slow. And then, when Isabella was about sixteen, there came a year of changes.

II

The first of them was the return of her sister Maggie. This was brought about by a week of bitter Christmas cold, which killed their uncle, who had long been in declining health. Maggie came home with a legacy of fifty pounds—which many people would regard as 'a fine fortune entirely,' but which was much less than had been expected, for Felix Hanlon's business had gone down during his tedious illness;—also with a natural endowment of high and blithe spirits, which no pounds could have purchased. She immediately joined the little band of Isabella's subjects, being deeply impressed by the charm to which her own robust and jolly person offered a most effective foil. It never occurred to her that there was any sort of equality between them, to make grounds for disputing Isabella's claims. On the contrary it seemed quite obvious that her younger sister was one of the people who must not get up on chilly mornings till the world has been warmed for them, and for whom the flower and

cream of things is fittingly reserved, from the freshest rose of May to the sweetest apple hoarded in frosty-hearted December. As for Isabella herself, she was well pleased with this new adherent. There were, no doubt, some points about Maggie that she would have liked less on a nearer view, if she had taken it, but then she did not. Her attention strayed instinctively away, when Maggie's talk might have revealed harder and coarser-grained aspects of the world than ever were seen at Baravon. Her curiosity was not at all acute, and glanced aside from anything disagreeable. She preferred not to hear about it, even if it had no possible connection with her own lot. When such a connection did exist, it distressed and shocked her. Once when she was a little girl, Mrs. Lonergan had thought to amuse Isabella with an incident from her own childhood, but it appeared in the course of the story that the young Hanlons were obliged to run about barefoot, a revelation at which Isabella was so sadly cast down as to make her mother refrain in future from all such reminiscences. Now, accordingly, though Isabella gladly acquiesced in the addition of her sister to their domestic circle, she did not attempt to imagine what Maggie's surroundings at Bantry had been. She left all conversation on that topic to her mother and sister, and sat by in a book or a dream, letting the sound of their voices flow past unmeaningly. Maggie, for her part stirring and practical, was more than willing to take a share in the household duties, and this was convenient, as Mrs. Lonergan had been rather less active than usual since an attack of bronchitis had befallen her at the setting in of

winter. Thus Isabella was more than ever mistress of her time, and freed from all need of, as people say, 'putting her hand to anything.'

The next event at Baravon House was the advent of what would in these days be called a 'paying guest,' one of the phrases that seem a distinctly written label for an age of shams. His coming was the sequel to a chapter of accidents in the Barry family. To begin with, Valentine Barry was offered a good temporary appointment in Tristia-Syrtania, where the climate is not salubrious for children, and whither he wished to bring his wife. This would have been incompatible with their six-year-old Mac, had not the Gerald Barrys been willing to entertain him during his parents' absence. But no sooner had that arrangement been made, and his parents sailed, than Eva Barry disconcerted all their plans by falling ill of pneumonia, and being ordered to flee southward from the blasts of the March winds. On board the Mediterranean-cruising yacht, by which the escape was to be effected, it seemed impossible to accommodate Mac, who again became a problem. It was solved by a timely thought of Gerald Barry's eldest sister. 'Why not send him over to Baravon House?' said Mrs. Deane-Wylwood. 'There couldn't be anybody more careful and fonder of children than Maggie Hanlon always was. And there couldn't be a nicer place than dear old Baravon; we used to delight in being there in poor Aunt Alicia's time. Of course poor Maggie would be only too glad of the chance; and the little girls would be nice companions for him.' Everybody whose opinion was of any consequence considered the

suggestion an excellent one. Mrs. Deane-Wylwood had not been astray in her conjecture that Mrs. Lonergan would rejoice at the prospect of taking charge of Master Mac, whose father she remembered as an occasional visitor to her nurseries in the good old days. Mac himself did not make any objection. He was accustomed to visiting among his relations, and rather looked forward to an unwontedly long journey to a quite strange place, where he understood that he would be entitled to regard himself as the head of the family. Mrs. Lonergan had luckily always been mentioned in his presence as a housekeeper; the word 'nurse' would have had disastrous results. Nor was anything said about the companionship of the 'little girls,' though their existence was made known to him with a startling shock. His grandmother, oblivious of the lapsing years, had good-naturedly dressed two small dolls for the daughters of her old favourite, and on the eve of Mac's departure she entrusted the parcel to him, with injunctions to bring it over 'for Mrs. Lonergan's children.'

'Merciful goodness,' Mac said, upon receiving the commission, 'are there brats about the place?'

'My dear!' said his grandmother, 'what do you call yourself?'

'Two wrongs,' said Mac loftily, 'don't make a right.' And she did not attempt to pursue the argument further. Nor did Mac press his protest. So, after a few letters had gone backwards and forwards, he made the journey himself, under the escort of the Barrys' valet, and at the nearest station to Baravon was met by Mrs. Lonergan, whom Dick M'Cabe had driven over on the car.

Mac entered upon acquaintanceship with her smoothly and auspiciously enough. He had no difficulty in classifying her, for there was nothing about her that seemed inconsistent with his other experiences of housekeepers. She looked nicer, he thought, in her black gown and bonnet than most of them ; that was all. And Maggie waiting for them at the gate, in a blue gown and white apron, with her face like a cheerful apple, and her hands full of hot buns, because she was 'sure Master Mac must be starved and perished,' appeared to him a quite appropriate housekeeper's daughter, especially as he had for the moment forgotten that she was supposed to be a little girl. But soon afterwards, when he was being conducted to his tea, laid out for him in state in a corner of the big dining-room, he fell into a blunder. As he passed through the brown-walled library, which the sunset was filling with long amber light, another girl, who had been sitting on a low seat in the window, rose up and came towards him across the track of a slanted sunbeam. She was dressed all in soft white, with a knot or bow of rose-colour here and there, and wore a misty white shawl over her shoulders. Her small face had little colour in it except the very dark blue of her eyes, and a cloud of dark hair curled and waved, seemed like the shadow of some wonderfully wrought coronal. She stood looking down at him with a bewildered sort of smile shining in her eyes, as if she were pleased and puzzled by his appearance, and he shook hands with her politely, but neither of them spoke, and they went their several ways. Isabella was at the moment so much occupied

with the adventures of Custance, a Roman emperor's daughter, victimised by the wiles of a 'scorpioun' mother-in-law, that she did not either recall, or speculate about, the circumstances which would have accounted for the presence of this sun-browned, fair-haired small boy. But Mac remarked to Mrs. Lonergan, 'She's one of my cousins, I suppose?' for his observations on society had led him to the conclusion that ladies were, as a rule, cousins when young, and aunts when of maturer years. Mrs. Lonergan replied, 'Sure not at *all*, honey; that's just me daughter Isabella.' And he afterwards overheard her repeating his mistake to Maggie, who seemed to think it curious and amusing. Now, Mac did not like to make mistakes, nor to have them laughed at; and this one gave him a slight prejudice against the cause of it, Isabella, who also disarranged his ideas by not apparently belonging to any of the social grades he had hitherto recognised. The feeling soon wore off, and they became good friends; but he liked, and continued to like, Maggie better, and she was his usual companion when he could not enjoy the more congenial conversation of the M'Cabes, busy with their spring sowing and planting. To Jim M'Cabe, his particular crony, he one day expressed the opinion that Maggie was three times prettier than Isabella; but Jim avoided committing himself to one view or the other in what seemed to Mac an unnecessarily cautious manner. 'You needn't suppose or imagine that I'd go and repeat it,' he said offendedly, 'for I wouldn't; not if you said she was as ugly as a whole flock of black crows.'

'And what at all 'ud bewitch me to tell such a

quare lie as that of milady?' said Jim, who was tying a rose-branch to a trellis.

'Are you sure she *is* a milady all the while?' said Mac; 'because, you know, Maggie isn't, and Mrs. Lonergan isn't. So if she is, why aren't they?'

'And if she isn't, what aren't they?' said Jim; 'for they're someways diff'rint, that's sure. What now would you say to it yourself, sir?'

This was quite beyond Mac; but the request flattered him, and he gave it careful consideration. 'I would say,' he pronounced at last, 'that if she isn't one, she's different in a very *like* sort of way.'

'Bedad, then, I wouldn't doubt but that's how it is, sir,' said Jim.

III

The arrival of Maggie and of Mac did not exhaust the events of this very exceptional season. Before May was out, another visitor came to Baravon House, a stranger, and an object of interest to all its inmates.

A few weeks earlier Leopold Rowan had been calling at a villa near Nice, and talking to his aunt Emily Barry. She was Mac's aunt likewise, so to Mac her thoughts naturally enough turned, when her nephew Leopold mentioned his purpose of going to the south of Ireland for some shooting, and spoke of spending a day or two at Glenmoreen. 'You'll be within easy reach of Baravon there,' she said; and then after a short hesitation added, 'I wonder, if you happened to be going in that direction, would you mind looking in on little Mac, the Valentines' boy,

you know, who 's staying there with our old housekeeper? I feel partly responsible for him now that they are away, and I should greatly like to have a report of him, and to hear something about the old place.'

'Why, to be sure I will,' said her nephew. 'I 'll make it my business to look him up, and I 'll send you an account of my inspection.'

This Leopold Rowan, though only just come of age, was a person of much importance, not merely in his own family, but in a wider world, being heir-apparent to a baronetcy and vast estates, with the prospect of a peerage looming rather more remotely. He was furthermore sufficiently handsome and agreeable to have in all probability become the cause of somebody's making a very bad match, if he had been scantily provided with worldly goods. Therefore, if he had not been a remarkably good-natured youth, his aunt would not have ventured to suggest that he should undertake such a commission. However, he was far from regarding the matter in that light, and put himself a little out of his way to fulfil her wishes promptly.

It was a transparently beautiful spring morning, without a cloud in the sky, when Leopold Rowan paid his first visit to Baravon House. He approached it by a path along the river, which tossed and danced in green and golden meshes on his left hand, while on his right a green and golden slope was always running up between the trees, flecked here and there with primroses, wood sorrel, and wild hyacinths. Just past the turn where he came in sight of the stone bridge, that had been described to him as a

landmark, he reached a small rustic arbour, through whose doorway he saw the dusky interior all lit up with the glimmering of a white gown. When he was quite near, Isabella glanced up off her book, and Leopold looked and saw her eyes in the shadow of her hair, and stopped to ask his way to Baravon House. Isabella's sister Maggie, who was at this time gathering violets with Mac Barry among the elms close by, observed their meeting, and said to herself that it was like the Sleeping Beauty and the Fairy Prince. Maggie had a tendency towards romance, though she had not met with much of it in real life, and her reading was not wide enough to furnish her with any less hackneyed models for hero and heroine than those in the obvious old fairy tale. On the present occasion, however, her similitude was not inapposite.

Everybody at Baravon was more or less aroused by this latest new comer, but the king, courtiers and domestics, so to speak, in no such magical degree as the Princess. For she woke up into a very wonderful sort of dream.

Certainly Leopold could not have been charged with any remissness in performing his promise to his aunt. He was better than his word, and evidently resolved to make himself thoroughly acquainted with his little cousin's surroundings. This could not be accomplished in a single visit, although it was a long one; and he returned on the next day, when he spent a considerable portion of the afternoon in whatever part of the garden Isabella was to be found. His object was, perhaps, to ascertain the kind of influence her companionship might

be expected to exercise over Mac; and with no doubt the same end in view, he arranged to go a-fishing with Mac and his friends on the morrow. But although the expedition set off as proposed, it might have been noticed that the operations with line and net, the splashing in pools, and scrambling among stepping-stones, were almost entirely carried on by Mac and Maggie Lonergan, while Leopold Rowan talked to Isabella about her favourite poets, so far as his somewhat scanty lore allowed him to pursue the topic, whence he diverged to others of a less literary complexion.

This was how it all began, and its development was very homogeneous; as normal a miracle as the growth of a plant. Before the spring had ripened into summer, it had become a matter of course that Mr. Rowan should spend most of each lengthening day at Baravon, and moreover that on these occasions he should devote his attention chiefly to Isabella. Perhaps, indeed, it is not quite accurate to say that she took the new state of things as a matter of course, for the wonderfulness of it seemed to her continually increasing. Still, she did learn to expect that marvels would happen daily, an attitude of mind which renders it liable to an overwhelming sense of flatness and insipidity, if it be provided only with ordinary occurrences. One day when Leopold had been somehow prevented from coming over, she was almost alarmed by the preternatural slowness with which the hours had passed. What struck her as so very strange was that this Mr. Rowan should have the power of adding such interest, such pleasure to her life. He was the first person she had ever

met, whose conversation she always preferred to the river's. It is true that her circle of acquaintances had been extremely small. The two M'Cabes practically represented to her mankind. At Mass she had seen a few others, the most distinguished of whom was Major Hancock of The Dykes, large, florid and eyeglassed; she had heard her mother and sister describe him as a fine figure of a man, but in her own opinion he was detestable. A lack of rivals did not, however, occur to her as explaining the impression made by this stranger. She needed no explanations to account for his demeanour towards her; that was quite in the natural order of things. Was she not used to the homage of Dick and Jim M'Cabe, and of successive weeding and hoeing boys? The present pair saluted her with a solemn awe, whereas she had seen them the other day in the kitchen-garden sportively pelting Maggie with last year's shrivelled windfalls. No, the mystery lay in her own sentiments towards him, rather than in his undisguised preference for her, which she accepted without any intentional arrogance as a customary tribute. And very soon she ceased to speculate at all about her feelings; they were too absorbing to be puzzling; the mystery was swallowed up in magic.

This same habitual sway of Isabella at Baravon helped to conceal from at least one of the onlookers the full significance of the situation. When Mrs. Lonergan saw her most dear daughter singled out and sought after by this very fine young gentleman, she was a proud woman; but she said to herself: 'Sure if he had eyes in his head, or sense in his mind,

who else would he be noticing so long as she was by?' Her many years of domestic service, too, had so steeped her in the spirit of caste, that her imagination could with difficulty emerge therefrom. To her view it was extraordinary enough that Mr. Rowan should sit talking to Isabella by the hour together 'for all the world as if she was a lady born,' without proceeding far and away further to presume on his part an intention of making her one in good earnest by way of marriage. Even the surmise that the child herself might take such an extravagant notion into her head, to her sorrow, was slow in coming to Mrs. Lonergan. But eventually it was from the standpoint of her constant solicitude on the child's behalf that she did attain to a true appreciation of the state of affairs, first becoming aware of the disquieting fact that Isabella was 'thinkin' a deal of him,' and then, after a course of care-sharpened observation, being half reassured by the conviction that he was 'thinkin' every atom as much of her.' The relief that it gave her could not but be mixed with much anxiety, so many difficulties obviously must beset the path of such ill-assorted lovers; so wide was the gulf to be bridged; so inevitable would be opposition on the other side. However devoted and constant Mr. Rowan might prove himself, she could not tell what insurmountable barriers it might be in the power of his friends to erect against his wishes. And the worst of it was that here her own conscience sided with the former, sometimes against the latter. It persisted in reproaching her with disloyalty to the family, whose dignity, importance, and general prosperity she had

for nearly half her life regarded as an interest of her own. It reminded her what she would have thought in the old days if she had heard that one of the Barrys, or anybody 'who was anything to them,' contemplated marriage with the child of an ex-nurserymaid—just such a misalliance as she herself was now passively, if not actively promoting. Right well she knew that it would be a cause of discord and dismay: though the magnitude of the misalliance, and the intensity of the dismay, she was far from realising, in her ignorance that Leopold Rowan was a great personage. Nothing of the sort was surmised either at Baravon or Glenmoreen, where the opinion of the neighbourhood unanimously pronounced him to be a real gentleman, but conjectured him a younger son, with the good looks and slender means appropriate to that accident of birth. On this point Mrs. Lonergan was no better informed than anybody else; and their theories about his status were confirmed into certainty by the length of time for which he remained contented with the most humble accommodation afforded by Terry O'Rourke's rough little tavern. 'If it's a very rich man he was,' they argued, 'is it puttin' up wid the likes of that he'd be for a week, let alone a couple of months? And nobody cookin' in it only ould Mrs. O'Rourke herself, that's got no more notion of the way Quality expects to have things than the black kettle sittin' on her hob?'

IV

Leopold himself, who was in the habit of writing occasionally to his aunt Emily, accounted to her for

his prolonged stay at Glenmoreen by explaining that he had found the Avonbawn singularly meritorious as a trout stream. His communications being received by a feminine household, which did not include any sportswoman, excited little surprise, although it was remarked that nobody had seemed to think so highly of the fishing there in the old days. Of Mac's well-being he sent a faithfully favourable report, and likewise of the good order and preservation of everything at Baravon House under Mrs. Lonergan's superintendence. That from the very first beginning of the correspondence he entirely suppressed her daughters, is a proof of his sudden quickness at the outset, making such a precaution so immediately expedient; that he continued to take it all through, was by no means due to ignorance of how rapidly he was approaching a point where it must cease to be possible. He was wholly bent upon marrying Isabella, if she would accede to such an arrangement, as seemed, he hoped, not improbable; and he was fully prepared to do so in despite of all the remonstrances, warnings and threats, which he could not regard as otherwise than certain to follow upon his friends' knowledge of his intentions. Also he was aware that it lay in their power to express their disapproval with emphasis by cutting off supplies; but his turn of mind did not lead him to consider this very deeply. On the whole, he thought, his best plan would be to keep the matter a secret from his uncles and aunts, and all his kin, until his marriage was an accomplished fact, and then to allow the loveliness of his bride to plead for its justification. This course had at least

the advantage of putting off a troublesome day, and of protecting those delightful summer ones from invasion by reproachful, lamenting, pleasure-pricking letters, or perhaps by bodily protestants, more disturbing still. And he adopted it with perseverance.

Thus while the sun of a season unwontedly cloudless and serene continued to shine upon his courtship, it was subject to no human frowns. For Mrs. Lonergan, her struggling scruples notwithstanding, could not but feel the predominance of pride and joy. Else would she have been more or less than motherly, having before her eyes a daughter so beautiful and happy, with a real gentleman—no little *shoneen*, mind you, but one of the old Quality —for her sweetheart, ready to worship the ground she set foot on, and he as fine a young man as a king could wish to call his son. But sure wasn't Isabella herself good enough to be fit for the highest in the land, that anybody need be thinking bad of him for setting his heart on her? Mrs. Lonergan felt that when little Isabella had come to such great grandeur and felicity, her own miserable marriage would somehow be atoned and compensated for, and removed from the category of utter failures. As for Maggie, her only difficulty was to hinder the smiles with which she surveyed the scene from becoming too conspicuously radiant and congratulatory. She seemed to be watching the happening of a fairyland romance, brought about in the heart of her home, and promising to provide with bliss for ever after the dearest of heroines.

Mac's attitude might be described as neutral. He had had no experience of such affairs, and he hardly

took any cognisance of this one, until on a certain June morning, when he was with young M'Cabe at the end of the pleasance that is bordered by a mossy path, overarched by the boughs of slender, silvery-stemmed beeches. Jim was using a small mowing machine, and making with it little green fountains, as it whirred over the sward among clumps of many-hued flowers, in what appeared to Mac a very enviable way, though he would not for the world have admitted how soon it made his arms ache when he was let push it. He always relinquished it with the remark that it wouldn't be fair to keep it any longer; to which Jim sometimes inconveniently rejoined: 'No hurry, sir, no hurry: work away with it as long as you like.' On this occasion, Jim had just stopped to clear an entangling trail of chickweed from the wheel of his machine, when the flicker of a white skirt went by between the beech-stems, and Mac said: 'I declare Isabella and cousin Leopold are walking up and down there still. Now I think it's a rather nasty, stupid old path, with nothing but trees in it.' Jim looked up and after the indiscriminating walkers. 'I wonder now how long it'll be before they've made up a match—his honour, there and milady,' he said more than half to himself.

'Are they making up a match?' said Mac. 'What is a m——; I mean what particular sort of match is it? Which is a thing no person can know without being told.'

'Well, sir, did you ever hear tell of a weddin'?' said Jim.

'I've *seen* a wedding,' said Mac, 'it was the

greatest nonsense on earth. And grandmamma said it wouldn't do instead of church on Sunday; so I can tell Maria I won't ever go in to look at another when we're passing St. John's. I should have thought cousin Leopold would have had more sense. But maybe he doesn't know the kind of thing it is—sitting for hours and hours in a horrid old seat, waiting for nothing at all to begin. Do you think they're making up the match now?'

'Very belike, sir,' said Jim.

'Perhaps some weddings are shorter than others,' said Mac. 'Anyhow, you know, I suppose, that it's with Maggie I'm making my match. Yesterday we were walking up and down the river-path, from the bridge to the wild-cherry rock, six times before the others came; that is three times up, and three times down, which makes six.'

'Is it Maggie?' said Jim. 'Oh, bedad, she'll be presently too grand altogether to look the way anybody is; that's what the end of it'll be—when they've married Quality.'

'I don't think Maggie is a grand girl *at all*,' said Mac. 'Milady is a little grand, perhaps; but Maggie's pretty, and uncommonly nice. Seems to me she looks the way anybody else is, if she wants to. Won't she look the way *you* are?'

Jim gave the mowing-machine a sudden shove, which sent a geyser of chopped grass and daisies dancing into the air; but it also cut down and mangled a very fine polyanthus, whose velvety bunch should by rights have been safely out of its track. 'There,' Mac said, pointing reproachfully to the wreck of purple and amber, 'you've took it into

a great many more pieces than it was put together with.'

'A fine botch I 've made of it, sure enough, sir,' said Jim. 'That 's what comes of talkin' foolish about other people's business. It 's nothin' to me whether she looks or no.'

Leopold Rowan and Isabella Lonergan, at any rate, could not be said to occupy themselves unduly about other people's business, as in those days they were most thoroughly engrossed by their own affairs, or rather, indeed, by a selection from them ; for they gave scant heed to some things that are a matter of concern to ordinary mortals. Mrs. Lonergan declared to Maggie her belief that if they gave Isabella the chickens' bit of food for her breakfast she 'd never notice the differ, but just sit looking out of the window, with her eyes shining like the stars and the blue night run together. And over at Glenmoreen, Mrs. O'Rourke more than once remarked upon the strange gentleman's habit of leaving all the letters that came for him by the post to lie on his chimney-piece for three or four days maybe at a time, without so much as opening an envelope. Circumstances favoured their self-absorption. The external world made itself unobtrusively agreeable to them, and had for thanks on their part, obliviousness. All the minor details of life at Baravon were pleasant through that gliding spring and summer. Fair weather beamed on the garden with its jewelled lawns, and crystal-twinkling fountains, and shadowy green paths leading down by the rush of clear, swift water. If a chance day of rain drove them indoors, it was not to be irksomely straitened and crowded.

There was the old library, quiet and quaint and venerable; and the hall, with white marble underfoot, and black Irish oak high overhead, cool and spacious; and the big drawing-room, with its wide floor and great bowls of odorous roses. And the few supernumeraries in the drama played their parts with befitting insignificance, and neither meddled nor made.

The nearest approach to a jarring note was a little incident that happened on a radiant July afternoon. The young people set out for a walk along the river, and, as was their wont, Maggie and Mac lagged behind gathering the wild flowers successfully, and failing to capture any fish out of the pools wherein they splashed. Isabella and Leopold walked on longer and further than they had ever done before, until they came to a turn in the winding stream which brought them to a place where they had in sight another bridge, some way ahead. Confronting them, on the opposite bank, stood a thatched cabin in a small, steep field. It was a miserable-looking dwelling, ruinous and weather-stained, with one little window huddled under the ragged eaves, and a low black door opening on a puddle. As they came by, out hobbled a lame old crone, wrapped in a tattered red shawl, with dishevelled white hair, and a wild demeanour. She made her way down to the river's edge, crying to them shrilly for money to keep her from starving. 'The poor old creature 's crazy, I believe,' Leopold said, and he threw half-a-crown across to her. It fell just short, dropping into shallow water among the stones; and, although he threw another instead, they saw her as they turned

homewards, still wading and stooping, and groping with her stick about the spot, and laughing and lamenting in a pitiful, childish sort of way over the disappointment of her quest. The sight of her and her hovel saddened Isabella with a melancholy that felt like a foreboding; and all the rest of the evening she was haunted by the remembrance of that rent roof cowering under a round-topped elder bush, and of its demented old mistress limping painfully in a greedily eager search for a coin. Yet when not many days later she heard Dick M'Cabe telling her mother that poor Mary Anne Clonisky, the cracked old woman who lived by herself down below near the Three-mile bridge, was after dying of a bad cold on her chest, that picture had faded from Isabella's memory, and she saw no thread of connection between herself and the ill-fated heroine of Dick's bit of news.

Weeks and months that pass unchequered by anything more seriously gloomy than a fleeting mood of melancholy may well be conjectured a time of serene brightness, when days slip by as smoothly as pearls on a silken string. So in the Baravon gardens ran the chronicle of fruits and flowers; strawberries' scarlet dwindling away under their abundant greenery, and caught on the cheeks of ripening eve-apples; geraniums and carnations burning in the wake of valley-lilies and violets, amid constellations of ever-faithful roses and pansies. There was no apparent reason why an end should come at all, except the inconsequent one that come it always does sooner or later. It arrived here at last on a day half-way through August, towards the

'setting of summer all golden, and sun's setting,' when Leopold Rowan and Mac Barry said good-bye to their friends at Baravon House. Leopold had received, and ultimately opened, urgent letters reminding him of shooting engagements in Scotland, and about the same time it became convenient for Mac's aunts to entertain him at Scarborough. Hence Leopold's good nature was again requisitioned to provide an escort for the child, and they were to be travelling companions. Mac was sorry to go. He regretted primarily Maggie Lonergan and Jim M'Cabe, and secondarily almost everything else about the place, including the prickly bushes with their ample burden of honey-blobs, and those others that dangled juicy, jet, and ruby and amber beads; and the sun-painted peaches on the glowing south wall. It was sad that his prospect of a return to all those delights should be merely a vague 'one of these fine days.'

Leopold's regrets were profounder and more concentrated; but then his absence was not to be of by any means such indefinite duration. He spoke with confidence of coming back in October at the latest; and his tone implied that he looked forward to the date as to a crisis in all their affairs. In fact, he had made up his mind to ascertain how the land lay among his kinsfolk before he put his fortune to the touch with Isabella. That he would do upon his return in any case; but whether or no he would take them into his confidence must depend upon the result of his investigations. A shrunken and deserted-feeling group watched the two travellers away from the door, and out of sight down the long vista

of the lime-tree avenue. Jim M'Cabe was driving them on the car; and if he had been perfectly frank, might have said that he did so 'with a heart and a half.' However, he had the discretion to keep his sentiments to himself.

V

It may be remembered that Mac sustained a shock of disagreeable surprise on the occasion when his grandmother entrusted him with a present for Mrs. Lonergan's daughters. This now was to give him an opportunity for inflicting a much severer one upon not only his grandmother but several aunts, as well as other connections. On the very day of his arrival at Scarborough, the donor of the dolls happened to enquire how Mrs. Lonergan's little girls had liked them. Said Mac:

'She 's got no little girls; there aren't any brats about the place, glory be to God. She 's only got Maggie and Milady, whose right name is Isabella, the same as Aunt Belle's; but *she* won't be my aunt, but my cousin and my sister-in-law. They 're as old as Aunt Amy, I should think, or very nearly. Milady's the beautiful one everybody says, but not in *my* opinion. Leopold can show you her photograph, for he took it a good many times with his kodak, and I heard him saying to her one day that he would have thought it an exquisite thing if he 'd seen it first. He was never done talking and walking about with her. I should think they must have said the same things over and over again, which is very tiresome. Now Maggie and I made up our

match without talking half as much. Maggie often says: "Ay will I, bedad," and "How's yourself?" just like Jim M'Cabe, and so does Mrs. Lonergan; but Milady never does. It's pretty vulgar, I think, and in my opinion vulgar people are much nicer than others. But, all the same, Milady'll do very well for a sister-in-law, and my cousin, which she'll be when she's married to Leopold.'

'Oh, my dear child, don't talk such absurd nonsense,' said Mac's grandmother and aunts.

'Nonsense?' said Mac. 'It's as sensible as anything can be. Why, everybody knows all about it. Jim M'Cabe says that Maggie'll be so set up with their family marrying into Quality, he supposes she won't look the same side of the road that anybody is. But I don't see that it's any great business of his even if she doesn't.'

Mac's relatives listened to these, and many other such communications, with rapidly increasing dismay, which they masked under professions of incredulity, expressed, however, with a prudent regard to risks of stopping the source of further revelations by a huff on his part. His audience included Mrs. Gerald Barry, mother of Baravon's present owner, at that time an Eton boy. She was a vivacious, energetic little person, an old familiar friend of Leopold Rowan; and she now announced the daring intention of at once attacking him upon the subject, and finding out whether there were really anything in Mac's alarmingly circumstantial romance. This she proceeded to do without loss of time, which pressed urgently, and all through the hurried luncheon that preceded Leopold's start for

the north, she plied him adroitly with insinuations, conjectures, and point-blank enquiries, all carefully kept in an atmosphere of jest, to prevent offence-taking, as undeveloped photograph films are kept from any save coloured light. But she failed to elicit any satisfactory result. Leopold was very far indeed from giving her the convincing denial that she had at the outset been fairly confident of obtaining; on the contrary, he more than hinted that the tale-bearer Mac had not wholly misrepresented the state of affairs; and when she had seen him off, she could only faint-heartedly attempt to reassure herself with a hope that he might have been just tormenting her all the while. The more she reflected upon this theory, the less tenable it seemed, and one fact about which she had no doubt was that he proposed to revisit Glenmoreen in the autumn.

Her report, which she hastened to make, spread consternation among her family circle, and was immediately followed by a council of war. At it denunciations of Mrs. Lonergan and her daughters were the order of the day, and evidently an altogether futile one. For when Mac's grandmother had repeated several times that of course if you come to consider it, those girls must be grown up by now, but that she would never have thought it of Maggie Hanlon; and when everybody else had assented, the situation seemed in no way altered. But Mrs. Gerald Barry again interposed, and this time with more effect. 'Undoubtedly,' she said, 'these Lonergans must be bundled out of the place without delay. And I declare I don't see what we could do better than spend the next six months at

Baravon ourselves—the children and I. The winters there are said to be much milder than at Bournemouth, which I was thinking of, and it would be far more economical. It would be just as well, too, to be at a quiet place for Grace's last winter *in*; I find it so impossible to prevent her from constantly emerging on one pretext or another. Besides it would be a good reason for getting rid of the Lonergan crew without any bother; and if once they were safely out of it, the chances are that we should have no more trouble about them. From what Mac and Leopold himself say, I don't fancy there 'll be any correspondence, but even if they did write to him, he 'll be moving continually, so that ten to one the letter would miss him; and if he wrote to Baravon, *that* would certainly be a dead letter. Really, everything considered, it seems to me the best plan.'

Everybody agreed that it was, and in pursuance of it steps were taken before the sun went down, as a consequence of which the post a few mornings later brought a most amazing letter to Mrs. Lonergan at Baravon House. It enclosed a month's wages, and curtly informed her that Mrs. Barry, who would arrive there that day week, wished to find the house empty. Mrs. Lonergan received these commands with a stunned sort of indignation, and prepared to obey them straightaway. So abrupt an ending to so long a period of faithful service struck her as outrageous, and unaccountable too, until she bethought her of possibilities connected with 'Master Mac's talk,'—a conjecture which explained things clearly and terribly. Maggie shared all her mother's

feelings. But to Isabella the event seemed as if Paradise were suddenly shattered into ruins around them, and a thorny wilderness-world springing up into its place. They were obliged to face the change with scanty means of mitigating it. Mrs. Barry said not a word of any pension or prospect of further employment. When something of the kind was suggested, she had replied, 'Oh, my dear, she must have made a fortune out of the place. If there was nothing else, look at the fruit in those gardens, year after year.'

'She has sent over quantities of apples and pears, and jams, you know,' some one admitted, 'and really, I believe, without making any charge for carriage or pots.'

'It 's charitable to suppose that she had some faint glimmerings of conscience,' said Mrs. Barry.

The Lonergans' first move was to Bantry, whither they were drawn by the matter of Maggie's legacy. As ill-luck would have it, her fifty pounds, which would now have been such a stand-by, had become involved in litigation about a disputed will, and at length, after weeks of delay, only a small fraction of the sum reached the legatee's hands. To Isabella it was a time of misery intense and new. Her transfer from the spacious chambers and pleasant lawns of Baravon to cramped and squalid lodgings in a dingy little street, was an experience she could never have imagined. The wilderness, she found, was not only thorny, but dirty, and smoky, and noisy. By and by, as the season waned, nipping cold was added to its distresses. Amid these unprecedented hardships Isabella drooped and

dwindled so perceptibly and progressively that her mother and sister, having done what little they could to shield her from them, contemplated her with chagrin and dismay. Yet all three of them looked forward hopefully to the lifting of these clouds at no very distant day—the day of Leopold Rowan's return. Her late repulse by the Family had indeed to some extent shaken Mrs. Lonergan's confidence; but the defection of strangers overseas could not cause Maggie any distrust of their summer friend—a presence so familiar through the long, bright months; and Isabella's faith never swerved, though it did fail to fortify her against the physical effects of their hard times. She was not even conscious of counting upon deliverance from penury and exile as a result of their meeting; it seemed to her that all she wanted was to see him once more.

This hope was what brought mother and daughters back to Glenmoreen when the woods were being gilt and stained in October. But to each other they spoke only about chances of finding some employment. And then followed a weary waiting, in dismal quarters, while their little store of money ebbed away, and doubt swelled up into despair. For of Leopold Rowan nothing was seen nor heard. Mrs. Barry had rightly conjectured no correspondence on the Lonergans' part; and she was right also about the fate of a letter which he ignorantly sent to Baravon House, apprising them that his return had been slightly postponed. Nobody there knew whither to forward it. The M'Cabes had been dismissed, and the servants were all newcomers. It was tossed aside and lost.

One day of bitter frost about Christmas time, Mrs. Lonergan made a desperate expedition to Clondroon, the nearest village to Baravon. Her objects were a possible job of needlework, and a visit to some old acquaintances from whom she thought she might learn something about the Barry family. In the matter of the sewing, disappointment was her portion; but worse than disappointment resulted from her interview with the Fottrells. The news she carried away with her confirmed all her strongest fears, and was a crushing, chilling load on her long trudge back through the bleak twilight and nightfall to Glenmoreen. She had not the heart to tell even Maggie; it was such a cold evening, and her walk had been so tiresome. So she tried vainly to win a happy look from Isabella by means of a couple of wizened oranges that she had bought for her out of their long home in a window-pane; and then she sought her bed, to leave it but once more. For she had taken a chill, and in three days was dead.

At this blackest hour in their lives, the one piece of forbearance that fate seemed to show towards the sisters was in allowing Dominic Fottrell to offer them a rent-free loan of the old empty cabin, vacated by poor Mary Anne Clonisky, away at the Three-mile bridge. It was not six months since Isabella had walked there with Leopold Rowan through the summer shadow and sun; but she had had time to wander a terribly long way from their former fortunes—almost as far as poor Mary Anne. And now a dark and fearful chasm, never to be crossed, had opened behind them. Maggie accepted old

Dominic's kindness with gratitude. The funeral had left them almost penniless. As she looked at Isabella sitting white and apathetic, she often said to herself: 'What 'll I do at all at all, when I 'm the only one in this world?'

VI

The news which had gloomed upon Mrs. Lonergan's last days told her that Leopold Rowan, having arrived at Baravon House towards the end of October, had been staying there, on and off, ever since. And her inference was that all the while he never had really thought anything of Isabella: 'For how else could it be that not a foot of him had come next or nigh them?' But she was mainly mistaken. Leopold had walked into the hall at Baravon fully expecting to find the party he had left there last August, and instead, he was welcomed by his widowed cousin Eva Barry, with a cordiality which was quite genuine, and a surprise the amount of which was somewhat exaggerated. She assumed insistently that his visit had all along been intended for her, and utterly declined to hear of his not having come to stay. A messenger had driven off to Glenmoreen for Mr. Rowan's traps, before Mr. Rowan well knew what was happening. The spectral white mists trailing in the background, and the clammy drizzle that made the air grey nearer at hand, helped to second her protests against his turning away from the warm and lightsome interior.

Then Mrs. Barry took care that in the course of the evening he should be made aware of certain

things in a casual sort of way. The old housekeeper —Leopold might remember her—had been found so unsatisfactory in some respects that it was necessary to get rid of her. She and her daughters had left the neighbourhood some time ago, and had gone to the south. So far Mrs. Barry related what she supposed to be facts, for she did not know that the Lonergans had just returned to Glenmoreen. Their gardeners, she mentioned further, people named M'Kay or M'Cabe, had also been dispensed with. She believed that one of them was engaged, if not actually married, to the younger daughter—the girl Leopold had admired so much—and that the whole party had emigrated from Queenstown. The belief which Mrs. Barry had attained to in this case was, strictly speaking, merely a strong conviction that such an arrangement would be very convenient and desirable; a conviction which in the hopeful mind may produce a sense of probability high enough to justify the use of the prophetic perfect tense, the wish being thus grandfather to the assertion.

However, Leopold was not allowed to depend upon the affairs of the Lonergan family for his entertainment. Many other distractions were provided for him. The party at Baravon House was a gay and agreeable one. It included Mrs. Barry's father, an elderly person, who turned a wide knowledge of the world into lively conversation, with a cheerful and pleasant humour which had been in a large measure inherited by his daughter and hostess. Her flock of pretty little girls were never permitted to tax the good nature that made their society in moderation an acceptable amusement to Leopold; but of much more moment was

the eldest and only grown-up daughter of the house.

Grace Barry, whose friends not unreasonably predicted that she would shine a star among the *débutantes* of the coming season, possessed, together with the freshness of seventeen, gifts of shrewd observation and insight, which often lent a piquant unexpectedness to her talk, while she had a tact and taste which made her unexpectedness almost always charming. Her singing was delightful to more critical people than Leopold; and in all manner of sports and pastimes she showed a dainty sort of proficiency that might have been learned from athletic elves. At the time when Leopold and she were first acquainted, she had acquired few of these accomplishments, and they had finally parted on the very worst terms, by reason of a dispute about the feeding of rabbits. But that was a dozen years ago, and neither of them now wished to keep up the quarrel, bitterly though she had once resented his refusal to let her fill the hutch with leaves of poisonous cow-parsley. During some snowstormy weeks towards Christmas-tide, they made considerable progress in restoring amity; Leopold, indeed, was so deeply occupied in this way, that he thought less and less about the girl with whom he had never quarrelled at all. And when, on the approach of spring, the climate of Baravon was found to be too damp, he took part in the consequent flitting of the Barrys to Algiers. And by the time that the sun had begun to shine too hotly upon the palms and oranges and aloes, those ancient enemies were an engaged couple. The arrangement was made with much less preliminary walking and talking than that

upon which Mac had animadverted as excessive in the case of the girl to whom Leopold of course never had engaged himself at all, and in connection with whom any such notion now seemed absurd enough. So Grace's mother said, writing home the news; but she owned in addition that she felt luckier than lucky at having got it safely settled before the season, when you never can tell what may happen to anybody.

Last summer and Baravon looked a long way off, yet next summer, speeding rapidly near, would bring back Baravon again, for at Baravon the wedding was to be. Grace had taken a fancy to the little old ivied church among the firs looking down on the river, and she saw visions of a picturesque bridal procession on foot through the descending lawns, and across the arched bridge, and up the steep shady path. August was the time fixed.

In August, therefore, a large wedding house-party began to assemble under the many-gabled roof of Baravon. Among the guests were Mac and his parents. Mac was well-pleased to re-visit a place of which he retained very happy reminiscences, and he expected the reality to correspond with them in the minutest details, having yet to learn from experience that we not only never drink twice of the same stream, but find our successive draughts of different, and generally inferior, flavours. He met with no exception now to this rule. Changes were sundry and manifold, and all for the worse. His old friends, including his especial cronies Jim M'Cabe and Maggie Lonergan, had all departed, and nobody knew anything about them except that they certainly

were not coming back. And as most sorry substitutes, he found what he described as 'a lot of horrid little squeaking girls, always running about wherever a person was.' He repelled every advance on the side of these intrusive young people with a solemn and stern disapproval, which impressed and discouraged them; and he resentfully scouted the suggestion that they might be appropriate companions for him. Still he could not avoid being thrown into their unworthy society to an extent that was irksome and *infra dig.* Even the weather exhibited the prevalent marks of deterioration, being often gloomy and wet, so that he could not escape out of doors. His mother was more than once embarrassed by the impossibility of restraining his public utterance of a wish that Grace would make haste with her old wedding, and let them go home. But a most serious affront befell him before the appointed day arrived.

It happened on a showery morning, the greater part of which he had been obliged to spend in the house. One of the few interesting occurrences that had relieved its tedium was the driving up to the hall-door of a temerarious tinker's donkey-cart, accompanied by a troop of tatterdemalion children. Mac, who with the despicable little girls watched from the breakfast-room window the rout of this disreputable party, improved the occasion by assuring Kathleen and Norah and Maud that when they grew up into aunts, their nephews and nieces would be just like the children out there with the cart, only perhaps 'blackier-looking and more raggeder.' This prophecy was received by Kathleen and Norah

with shrill incredulity, but Maud, weaker-spirited and simpler-minded, bewailed with dismal howling the prospect of such extremely unattractive connections. Thereupon some of the elders who were present interposed to restore concord, or at least tranquillity, and good-natured old Aunt Cherry, thinking to create a timely diversion, called Mac to come and look at something very pretty. Mac came, mistrustingly, and was shown a coloured fashion-plate, on which a small boy in fantastic pink and silver garments appeared to be wading among wild surges of white tulle and lace. 'There, my dear,' said Aunt Cherry, 'that 's a picture of the pretty dress your kind grandmamma 's sending over for you to wear at the wedding—if you are a good child. Kathleen and her sisters will be bridesmaids, you know, in sweet little blue silk sacs; but you are to be a little page, and help dear little Aylmer O'Sullivan to carry your cousin Grace's beautiful long white satin train. Won't that be nice? Do you see what fine lace ruffles he has, and lovely little pink shoes with silver buckles?'

Mac looked, fortunately, unutterable things for a moment at this object of admiration. Then he said deliberately, 'If she *will* wear her gown too long, and wants somebody to keep it from streeling through the puddles, of course I can hold it up for her. And if my hands were very exceedingly dirty and black-marky, I wouldn't mind washing them. And if my boots was most extrornarly muddy, a great deal worse than these ones'—he protruded a toe which might, not without reason, have been considered quite sufficiently bemired—'*perhaps* I would

change them. But as for supposing or imagining that a person would ever go and dress himself up like that odious, disgusting, detestful-looking little wretch—may the Saints have my sowl if I 'll do any such a thing.' And with that he stumped firmly away, leaving behind him dismay at his resolution as well as at the terms in which it was expressed. For ornamental small boys happened just then to be rather scarce, and the securing of Mac's services had been a chief object in his invitation. However, most people assented to Aunt Cherry's opinion, which was, that a little coaxing would soon bring him round when the time came.

VII

But before it did come, so much had gone wrong with the arrangements for the wedding, that Mac's recalcitrancy seemed a trivial drop in a flood of mischances. The inclemency of the weather was at the bottom of all these troubles. It grew steadily worse as the fateful Tuesday, the Fifteenth, drew near, and, for the week preceding, rain incessantly fell. Baravon is a place where the effects of such excesses made themselves annoyingly felt, because the house was cut off from more inhabited regions by the river, and in wet seasons the river had a habit of promiscuously dashing over bridges, sometimes so much to their detriment as entirely to sever the connection laboriously established by mason and engineer. Now the Avonbawn was daily waxing more reckless and headlong in its course. The sound of its throbbing tramp reached far up into

the sodden woods above it, where the mists that perpetually haunted them looked like the ghost of its white seething. On every side torrents were tumbling down to swell it with swirls of foam, and high up on Slieve Crievan the waterfall overspread the broad face of the cliff with a sheet of snow. People said that there must be a powerful weight of water above in it, and that unless the weather took up very presently, the Avonbawn was apt to be doing more than a little mischief in the country.

And, true for them, on the morning of the day but one before the wedding, Leopold, who, with his best man, Vaughan Creighton, was staying at a friend's house over the stream, came early across to bring inconvenient intelligence. The road-bridge had sustained such serious damage from the floods in the night, that its repair would be a matter of weeks, during which time the church would be accessible only on foot to the inmates of Baravon House. Their own bridge, with its high-pitched Gothic arch and massive piers seemed perfectly safe, which was lucky, as they had no other means of communication. This news caused general concern, but it did not altogether displease the bride elect. She had reluctantly given up her project of a walking wedding, as too likely to clash with a downpour. Now it had become a necessary step, prudent or no, and they must hope for a dry hour. At that moment no rain was falling, and Tuesday might of course be beautifully fine. Grace was disposed to take optimistic views, and when the puddles began to dance again, pronounced it to be only the clearing shower.

But a little later in the day she received news of another disaster so much more serious that it wrecked all her faith in future good fortune, and enveloped her in a gloom which would not have been dispelled by a promise of the most appropriately brilliant sunshine. Among the untoward circumstances that had menaced the success of her bridal pageant had been the non-arrival of the flower and sum of her trousseau — the wedding-gown. About this supreme creation Madame Floribel had showed herself even less punctual than is her wont; however, anxiety had at length been allayed by a telegram authentically announcing its actual despatch; and Michael Dermody, who had driven over to fetch it from Glasmartin railway-station, might now be expected at any time, even allowing for delays on the bad roads. Whereupon Michael, appearing in the mid-afternoon, was the bearer of nothing save evil tidings. Away below, a bit beyond the Three-mile bridge, his doleful story ran, the chestnut had taken upon herself to shy at a couple of people riding home double from Mass, and had backed the car over the steep bank slap into the river, that was ragin' mad and leppin' out of its skin. By the greatest luck at all, he himself got just time to fall head foremost into a furze-bush; but the mare was drownded, let alone breakin' her back, and the car was smashed into sticks, and swep' away in the flood, wid every ha'porth on it. 'Ay, bedad, your ladyship, the big wicker hamper affair too—all bet to bits, and swallied up like a wisp of hay—such destruction was never witnessed.'

Here was a calamity overwhelming and irreparable.

Grace could hardly feel that the tragedy of it would have been deepened if Mickey had shared the freakish chestnut's fate in the wild waters, which were now being robed with her shimmering satin and delicate tulle. She could scarcely realise that it was at all mitigated by the consideration to which Mrs. Barry referred with gratitude, saying: 'Oh, my dear child, isn't it a mercy that we decided not to use your god-mother's flounces for the skirt?' It seemed to her that everything was ruined. What would a wedding be without a wedding-gown! At first, in fact, she declared that it was impossible, and must be put off until they could procure another. The idea of a post-ponement did not by any means suit her mother, for several reasons, among which the expense of a new creation was not without weight. But it was only after much remonstrance, entreaty, and persuasion, in which the transfer of a long-coveted set of opals played a part, that Grace yielded the point, and consented to appear on the happy occasion in her travelling costume of biscuit-coloured bengaline. She still averred that she did not care a pin about it now, and would just as soon not be married at all. A heavy cloud brooded over the household.

If they had but known, the missing garment all the while was not very far away, and not much the worse for its voyaging amid the turbulent eddies of the Avonbawn. That voyaging had been brief and scathless—Michael Dermody's 'all bet to bits' was simply a picturesque flight of fancy—and the dress-basket had found a haven among some high-lying boulders just in front of the little cabin with its clump of elder-bushes, which had a twelvemonth ago

sheltered old Mary Anne Clonisky's crazy head, and was now inhabited by Maggie and Isabella Lonergan.

This daily-dripping summer had been a season of care-haunted loneliness and sorrowful straits to the sisters, or rather to Maggie, for Isabella's absorbing grief seemed to lap away from her all the details of trouble, as the wide waves, where the river was fullest, hid every rocky crest under one smooth mantling of foam. If food and fire should fail her, she would little heed the lack of them among all that she had lost. But Maggie, whose affliction was less bewildering and strange to her, could not forbear concern about means of subsistence, the attainment to which grew more and more a difficult problem. Now and then she solved it temporarily by getting a job of sewing, and would bring home a bundle of needlework, over which she and Isabella toiled hugely for a few pennies' pay. Hitherto, however, their main support had been derived from the sale of their small personal property. Isabella's wardrobe was larger than is common with maidens of her rank, for her mother had been deftly industrious in supplying her with dainty apparel, and was seldom without some embroidery in hand for the embellishment of the soft white robes that had been her favourite wear in the summer pleasance at Baravon. All these pretty things Maggie now sold to an eager-looking Jewish couple who had a second-hand clothes stall at Killeek fair; but the money they brought in drew towards an end as steadily as the summer, and at the beginning of August she was thinking uneasily about their prospects of getting through the winter.

Isabella herself was another cause of anxiety. In the milder weather she regained the beauty that had drooped during the hardest times, but it was such a very fragile bloom that it struck even casual and inexperienced beholders as ominous. On one of their rare fine days, one of their few and far-off neighbours happened to pass by where Isabella was sunning herself on a stone beside the stream. 'Whethen now, girl alive, is it waitin' there you are for a weeny breath of win' to come and blow you away?' Mrs. Ryan said, and walked on smiling at her own conceit, which left a sting of dread in Maggie's heart. It incited her to procure a visit from the doctor, who told her that if they were not very careful, her sister would probably have an attack of nervous fever, with small chance of recovery; and as he had no practicable precautions to suggest, his opinion was not reassuring. About this time also, she heard how Miss Barry above at Baravon was 'just about getting married to young Mr. Rowan, him that used to be stopping at Glenmorcen last summer.' Maggie had long since abandoned all hope with regard to Leopold Rowan, and she trusted that, as Isabella seldom saw any one, the news might not reach her. Still the certainty and the risk provided additional matter for regret and apprehension.

Thus Maggie had many things troubling her mind on the Sunday when she trudged off alone through the rain to early Mass at Connelbeg, and when on the road home, who should come running after her, and shake the two hands nearly off her, saying: 'Och, Maggie Lonergan, *alanna*, and what way are

you this great while?'—but Jim McCabe himself? Jim's former doubts whether she would 'look the way he was' proved quite erroneous, for, to tell the truth, she looked at him much as she might have done at an angel come shining to unlock the gate into a long shut-up garden of Eden, while she listened to his story of the bad luck that had followed him for months after they had left Baravon, and of how he had now at last got a grand place with good wages in the County Fermanagh, which was the reason he had come to see Maggie. Just to remind her that they were still on the unweeded side of the gate, she was indeed obliged to tell him about their sorrowful loss. And then she found that after seeing Isabella with her over-brilliant eyes, and listless, restless ways, Jim too was impressed by a melancholy change. 'I wouldn't say, Maggie,' he replied to a question, 'but Milady's grown somethin' wakely lookin' to what she was. I dunno how it is, rightly, but she's like to me as if the blossom of a flower had a sort of fire-flame burnin' through it, that's not accordin' to nature.' Jim's diagnosis was not very encouraging either; nevertheless his reappearance seemed to Maggie a most joyful one, and she could not help believing that all things would now begin to mend.

Important events are apt to occur in a series; and so the next day was marked by Maggie's discovery of the tossed-up dress-basket among the boulders, where it had been lying for more than four-and-twenty hours. She tugged it up to their door, and tried vainly to arouse Isabella's interest in speculations about its contents. But she was glad of her

failure, when she saw what these were. For she felt instinctively that a sight of this wonderful, glistening, snowy thing would be to Isabella as fuel to the longing and regret that consumed her for the sake of the lost old days when she herself, clad in white, inhabited a garden world with a mother and a lover in it. So Maggie hurried over her inspection, just noting that there were no traces of injury, except on one breadth of the skirt, where the gloss of the satin was dimmed by a little patch of damp; and then she made haste to restore it to its elaborate wrappings, and stowed the hamper away in a corner beside the dresser. She intended to make enquiries about it on the first opportunity.

VIII

The morning of the Fifteenth found many anxious lookers-out for signs of fine weather, some on account of their deluged harvest-fields; some because it was a great holiday; others for more miscellaneous reasons, and among these were included the household at Baravon. For although the day's ceremony had been despoiled of its most distinctive features, and the bride bereft of her ornaments could not forget to bewail them, it yet seemed desirable that the sun should shine, or, at any rate, that downpours should not descend, upon the wedding. But all these observers, whether bent upon business or pleasure, were disappointed by what they saw. The face of the sky wore a murky gloom. It was for the most part lead-coloured, and its highest lights nowhere suggested anything less lack-lustre than

tarnished tin. Fitful gusts of a boisterous north wind brought up heavy clouds whose blackness made their grey background lividly pallid by contrast, and under this canopy the vivid hues of grass and flowers looked hard, crude, and garish, during the intervals when driven showers ceased to blur and extinguish all the glowing green and red.

Grace surveyed this cheerless scene rather indifferently; she felt out of conceit with the whole affair in a discouragingly premature sort of way. Her little sisters' feelings were more acute, seeing that with the bridal robe had vanished all their bridesmaids' glory, and nothing apparently was to happen but a flat and commonplace church-going in no exceptional attire. Mac's contemporary, Aylmer O'Sullivan, was amply consoled for his suppressed pageship by becoming the hopeful spectator of preparations for a wedding breakfast that promised to prove a most satisfactory success. But Mac himself, haunted by fears that his elders might still be harbouring insensate designs about his toilet, determined to frustrate them by slipping clandestinely out of doors. This he contrived to do in the course of the morning, and made his way through the pleasance, where much-battered geraniums gleamed, and tall hollyhocks and lilies lay broken, down to the banks of the river, which he heard plunging and roaring under the shelter of the trees. There he might lie perdu and dabble enjoyably. It was not yet nearly time for the wedding, as the latest possible hour had been chosen, to give the weather a chance of improving after noon.

Away at the Three-mile bridge, on the contrary,

Maggie Lonergan had business that it behoved her to get through as early as she could. She wanted to attend Mass, and to report at the police barracks the waif she had picked up, and she wished to do both errands before her sister awoke. Isabella had been restless all the night, until she took a draught given her by Dr. Allen, and she was now in a deep sleep which was likely to hold her for several hours. So Maggie hurried off.

But very soon afterwards Isabella awakened, and one of the first things that she noticed, as she looked round the room for Maggie, was the strange large hamper. She had scarcely heeded it last night, but now she opened it, and drew out with a shock of surprise the sheeny silken folds. Their delicate softness and whiteness seemed to her a glorified version of the gowns she had been fond of wearing in old summer times at home before her life was wrecked; she could almost fancy that this was one of them. For a while she stood fingering it and dreaming; and presently she found herself putting it on instead of her coarse black serge. By the time that she had fastened all its fine little buttons and hooks and ribbons, there had come over her a dreamier sense of nearness to the old days and places, and when she had tied the last knot, she wandered out of the house with a vague half-belief that she would be stepping back into the beloved garden at Baravon. But in reality she saw no vestiges of the past except the river, which had always been her familiar companion. Its aspect and voice were a forlorn sort of consolation, and as she looked and listened, a mingling of remembrance and

forgetfulness made her think confusedly that she was on the wrong side of it, and that if she could cross over, all might be well again.

With this dimly in her mind, she began to walk along the bank, lured on partly by the sight and sound of the rushing water, and partly by a more remote vision of reaching a bridge. The footpath was fairly smooth, and generally strewn with the fir-needles of the grove which it threaded. Winding softly up and down, it bent aside here and there from the river for a little way ; and now and then Isabella had to follow a higher track between the stems, because the lower one was flooded. When she came to such places she made as much haste as she could, uneasily, as if she had lost a friend's company; but her progress was slow, being greatly impeded by her trained skirt, which she painfully kept from trailing on the damp ground, and catching on the rough tree-trunks. Sometimes, too, she stumbled over straggling roots, because she was looking on further before her in expectation of a bridge. She walked on thus for a long way, so very long that it grew into a reason for continuing; but no bridge spanned the wild white river. The sweeping roar of it in her ears helped to make her dizzy and bewildered. Her memory faltered and lapsed, wavering in and out like the moon's light among cloud-drifts. Sometimes she thought she heard old voices calling to her from the opposite bank, and then suddenly recollecting how that could not be, would turn away with bitter grief. If anybody had fallen in with her among those shadowy paths, he might have had little difficulty in imagining that he

had lit upon some eerie place, subject from olden times to the hauntings of a tearful and dishevelled bride.

At long last, however, she did come to Baravon bridge, which she hastened across in a trance of oblivious hope. It deepened when, a few paces further on she caught sight of little Mac Barry sitting in his favourite nook among the wet boulders above the deep pool beyond one of the piers. For that moment she felt quite certain of soon finding all the others again, and she ran towards him calling his name delightedly. What Mac may have imagined or supposed on this occasion, is best known to himself. What he did, as he saw the swiftly approaching cloud of floating, filmy draperies, all colourless save for a fleck of soft dark tresses, was to stand very erect on the flat top of a stone, and remark loudly and defiantly: 'There isn't any such things as ghosts. So there's no good in dressing up and pretending. Only it might frighten a person who didn't know any better, and people oughtn't ever'— But his moral reflections were cut short and remained unfinished. For before she came within reach of him, this doubtfully canny visitor, girl or spectre, tripped somehow, and, losing her balance, fell over into the dark, eddying pool.

She cried out, and tried to save herself by clutching at an overhanging snowberry-bough, but the small brittle twigs snapped in her hand, and no one of more avail than little Mac Barry seemed to be within hearing. He had the sense not to wade out further than he could keep his footing, and he grasped her long, floating skirt, and at-

tempted to drag her on shore thereby, a feat, of course, far beyond his powers. However, he prevented her from being at once swept out into the fierce main-current by the waves that ever and anon came weltering through the pool, dashing roughly over the dark head as it sank lower and lower. And he called at the top of his voice, interspersing his shouts with uncomplimentary animadversions upon the conduct of people who always were bothering about everywhere else in the world except the place where a person wanted them. It was an unequal struggle, and could be but brief.

Just at this time, a bridegroom and his best man were strolling down from the church towards the bridge, to see if there were any signs of a party leaving the house. The appointed time had come very near, and Leopold Rowan conversed with a disjointed fatuity, treated by his companion with a tolerant forbearance. Suddenly Vaughan Creighton said: 'By Jove—did you hear that?' To whom Leopold, laughing unmirthfully, replied something about the bell beginning to ring. 'Oh, nonsense,' said Creighton, 'it 's some one in the river'; and he set off running. Then again came the cry, in a voice that Leopold recognised this time: and despite Creighton's start, Leopold it was who jumped first off the bridge-steps into the pool, to relieve the wrathful and unornate train-bearer of his office.

'There! finely you've splashed us,' Mac complained hypercritically. 'Flumping down that way, as if a person couldn't have held her plenty long enough for you to come round properly.'

As he stood knee-deep in swirling foam that

tugged and clamoured at him, while the girl whom he had believed at the other side of the Atlantic clung to him with a drowning grip, Leopold's last year seemed melting away till past and present were mixed in a misty sort of dream. Its strangeness so preoccupied him that when he carried Isabella to the bank, he was half unconscious of his surroundings. He scarcely noticed that Maggie Lonergan and Jim M'Cabe had just come up panting and breathless from a long run. He was quite unaware that the bridal procession, with umbrellas and waterproofs, had emerged from an adjacent shrubbery. His mind was wholly given to watching the light of life steal back into Isabella's face, when Creighton sought to interrupt him, calling to him at his elbow, with a loudness made necessary by the brawling of the Avonbawn, which seemed to muffle every other sound. 'She's all right now,' Creighton said, 'come along, Rowan, for Heaven's sake. Miss Barry's waiting, and there's no time to lose, if there's to be a wedding to-day.'

'To-day?' Leopold said vaguely, without looking round, 'Why, you see, of course it can't be to-day.'

Perhaps he was not really quite sure what wedding he meant. There was no uncertainty, however, in the mind of one spectator, as she looked down on him from a point of vantage on the bridge —a girl in a grey cloak, with a vivid brunette colouring, and delicate aquiline profile shown under her large plumed hat, which the raindrops were pelting maliciously. 'Not to-day, indeed,' Grace Barry called clearly above the hoarse accompaniment of the river, 'nor any other day so far as I am

concerned. And in my opinion it's highly absurd to be here getting drenched. Come, Kathleen and Norah, see who'll get home first,' she said, and darting past her grandfather, who tried to stop her, she sped up the slope, followed by the little girls, in a race which she won.

'Glory be to goodness,' observed Mac complacently, 'I don't believe there's going to be any old plague of a wedding after all.'

'I wonder,' anxiously said his cousin Aylmer, surveying the situation with equal promptitude from another point of view, 'I wonder now will they go and not have the breakfast.'

Although things appeared to be somewhat intricately involved on that wet afternoon at Baravon, it so happened that before very long no less than three couples 'sorted themselves' from among the persons there present. One of these matches was regarded with profound dissatisfaction by the bridegroom's family. Mrs. Gerald Barry generally spoke of it as 'that wretched boy Leopold's Ophelia-folly.' She was not at all too well pleased either, when her daughter Grace elected to become the wife of Vaughan Creighton, for though she admitted him to be a very nice fellow, his means were miserably moderate. About the third pair she would not have thought it worth while to form an opinion. Yet if the faculty of 'knowing one's own mind' is a prognostication of happiness, the prospects of Mr. and Mrs. Leopold Rowan, and of Captain and Mrs. Vaughan Creighton, might have been considered on the whole less brilliant than those of Jim and Mrs. Jim M'Cabe.

THE AUNT OF THE SAVAGES

MAC BARRY and his cousin Aylmer O'Sullivan had spent a rather dreary week at Sheenagh House, to which they had been suddenly driven over from Glenamber, away beyond the other end of the lough, because in the household there a case of measles had occurred very inopportunely, just before the great occasion of their cousin Norah's wedding. The two little boys did not like their change of quarters, for at Sheenagh House they found nobody but two elderly servants and Uncle Stephen, an old bachelor, who did not care for children, and did care for havings things tidy. Mrs. Connell, the cook, and Lizzie, the parlourmaid, thought it their duty to be constantly 'keeping an eye on the young gentlemen,' and to the young gentlemen this seemed an inconvenient and evil eye, which discovered mischief in the most harmless occupations. So they sometimes thought the hours too long in those showery July days. Then, one morning, Uncle Stephen, on his way to breakfast, came upon them where they were making a plantation, with seedling sycamores grubbed up in the shrubbery, just at the bottom of the hall-door steps. It was not, perhaps, a very suitable situation, and they certainly had scattered about a great deal of black

earth, keeping a liberal supply for their own hands and faces. Uncle Stephen seemed annoyed when he stopped to tell them that they must not make such a mess; and as he was going in, he added: 'I believe your Aunt Amy is coming to see you this afternoon, so I hope by that time you will look more like civilised beings and less like young savages.'

Thereupon Mac and Aylmer, who had already breakfasted, went and talked grumblingly under the big sycamore close by.

'I wonder where this old aunt is coming from *bovvering*?' said Mac. 'There weren't any at Glenamber.'

'I don't like aunts,' said Aylmer. 'Mine is always asking me seven times three times, and the dates of kings and things that are no affair of hers.'

'Mine are great-aunts,' said Mac; 'and they talk and talk as if a person was always wanting to hear about kittens and tame tomtits.'

'We might stay away outside till she's gone,' suggested Aylmer.

'Let's go and live like wild savages, and never come back here any more, for one can't be let do a single thing,' said Mac, with resentful reference to their interrupted plantation.

'Savages is black,' Aylmer objected.

'Well,' said Mac, 'I dare say we might *grow* black if people let us alone.' He looked hopefully at his grimy hands.

'What do savages live wild on?' Aylmer wondered.

'Oh, hunting and fishing. We could fish plenty,'

said Mac, 'in the lake over there, that we saw the time Lizzie came screeching after us to say we'd be drowned in the bog-holes. And I've three matches in my pocket, that strike on anything, to cook them with.'

'And there's a beautiful old fishing-rod in a corner in the back hall. It only wants a bit of string, and that,' said Aylmer, 'I can get off a parcel of oatmeal I saw in the pantry.'

'Then we'll get it now,' said Mac, 'for Mrs. Connell's feeding the hens, and Lizzie's always making herself another cup of tea in the kitchen until she has to go up and do the rooms. Nobody won't see us.'

Nobody did see them as they secured the fishing-rod, and stole out into the shrubberies—nobody but old Moriarty, who was raking at the end of the laurel-walk, and they did not mind passing him, because they knew him to be black out with Mrs. Connell and Lizzie, so that he certainly would not mention it.

'When we're savages,' Mac said, as they walked along, 'we mustn't ever speak to anybody, but only make signs.'

'What's signs?' said Aylmer. 'I don't know how to make them; and I'd rather fish.'

'It's as easy as anything. You just wave your hands about a little, and crook your fingers, and waggle your head,' Mac said, doing so to show how, 'and those is signs.'

'But what do savages make them for?' said Aylmer.

'Why, of course,' said Mac, 'so that people mayn't

understand what they mean. Savages is uncommonly cunning.'

'Oh, I see,' Aylmer said. But when they had gone a few steps further he added: 'If *I* wanted people not to know what I meaned, I just wouldn't say anything at all.' Aylmer, who was fat and rather lazy, often considered about ways of saving trouble.

It was not far to the lough, along a path smooth under thick evergreens, and rougher presently under hazel and hawthorn-bushes, and then soft and springy where it crossed the corner of a bog. Here Mac and Aylmer luckily did not stray into any of the treacherous places where black-looking holes lurked among mossy patches sprinkled with dim white blossoms. They followed the faint track until it brought them to the brow of a grassy slope leading down to the lough. One end of the long, narrow lake curved round there and met a wide band of greensward. Rainy weather had filled it fuller than usual, so that the clear water came brimming up over the gravelly rim which generally bounded it with a sharp gleam, and it lay amongst the fine short grass-blades in silvery-edged streaks, as if it had been spilt on a carpet. If you looked down into it, you could see drowned daisies and speedwell at the bottom, strangely mixed with the drifting blue and snow of the sky. A lane, overhung by steep woods, skirted the opposite shore, but nothing was moving on it. The little boys thought they had come to a delightful place, especially when Mac remembered that savages never wore shoes and stockings, and they put theirs on the flat top of a boulder. It was very luxurious wading, with the soft grass under

foot, and the sun-warmed ripples lapping about their ankles, and nobody to be shocked no matter how much they splashed each other. They had made their way along the margin nearly round to the lane before either of them had had enough of the amusement. Then Aylmer, who was carrying the fishing-rod, trod on a pebble, which hurt his foot slightly, and made him think that it would be pleasant to stop for a while. So he said: 'Do you see how it 's all ruffled up in there between those two sticking-out rocks? It must be crammed *full* of troutses. I 'll begin fishing.'

'That 's only the wind in the water,' said Mac. 'Fishes make round circles, and hop up out of the middle of them like big shiny frogs. I don't believe there 's any in that place; but you can have the first turn of fishing at them.'

Aylmer sat down on a grey boulder, which looked as if it had been badly cracked long ago and stuck together with strips of the greenest velvet, and he began to fish steadily. His hook was a tin-tack, and his fly a buttercup. 'They might think it was a yellow very fat wasp,' he said. Mac was for a while quite content to go on with his wading; he went in deliciously deep, and once, falling down, partly by accident, got thoroughly wet, which was most enjoyable; and he hopped on one leg to and fro between several islanded tufts of bracken and chumps of furze. But when both his ankles began to ache, he thought he would like a change, and standing beside Aylmer, he said affably: 'Now you 're tired holding it, I 'll take it for a bit, and you can be playing about.'

Aylmer, however, only wagged his head slowly sideways, and waved one of his hands in the air.

'You great gaby,' Mac said, 'we're not going to be savages except to other people; and you know you were talking like anything just this minute.'

Aylmer nodded three times, and kept a firm hold on the fishing-rod.

'Look here,' said Mac, 'you might be finding sticks to light the fire with when we want to cook them.'

Still Aylmer said nothing, but flourished his hand in a way which evidently meant 'Find them yourself.' He looked fat and aggravating, and as if he did not intend to stir. So Mac said, 'Give it to me, will you? and get out of that,' and made a clutch at the rod.

'You beast!' said Aylmer, 'I 'd just got a beautiful bite, and you 've went and shook it off.'

'I wouldn't mind if I 'd shook off your stupid head,' Mac said. Whereupon they scuffled so violently that Aylmer's hat, which was a large straw one, fell into the water, and began to float quickly away. This accident shocked them so much that they stood still immediately, for to a small boy the loss of his head-covering seems as serious as the destruction of a roof. Aylmer lay face downwards on the flat boulder, and made a grasp at the hat as it went bobbing by, but all he did was to soak one of his jacket-sleeves right up to the shoulder. 'There now,' he said, turning up a countenance full of wrath, 'it 's swum away to drown itself, and here am I in the blazing sun, enough to kill me.'

'I don't believe savages ever do wear hats,' Mac said, putting a bold face on the matter, 'and I won't anyway.' He flung down his straw hat so roughly that the brim cracked nearly off the crown, and a tuft of water forget-me-not stuck up through the chink.

'And dripping wet I am, too,' Aylmer went on, 'getting my death most likely.'

'He'd be welcome to a loan of the ould sack,' a voice said startlingly close behind them, and there stood two little girls, who had come quietly over the grass on bare feet, though they had not been wading. One of them held in her hand a long rope with a small white goat grazing at the end of it, and the other was carrying a couple of brownish sacks and a reaping-hook. They wore short ragged skirts, and over their heads rough grey shawls, under the shadow of which their narrow faces looked all eyes. The biggest of them was perhaps as much as nine years old, so that to Mac and Aylmer she seemed an experienced person.

'If he had it over the head of him,' she said to Mac, 'he could take the little wet coateen off of him, and let it get a chance to dry in the sun. There's a very handy hole in the end of this one,' she said, unrolling the empty sacks, 'and there's plenty of time yet to be fillin' them wid the grass. Rosy M'Clonissy owns it, but she'll loan it and welcome, wouldn't you, Rosy? Say: "Ay, bedad."'

'Ay, bedad,' Rosy said in a hoarse, shy whisper.

Aylmer, who found his drenched sleeve uncomfortable, and the unshaded sun dazzling, thought he would try this plan, and taking off his jacket, wisped

himself up in the sack. Mac considered the costume so appropriate that he put on the other one; and then they did both look as uncivilised as anybody could wish, with bare legs and arms and dirty faces emerging from the rough, earth-coloured folds. The elder little girl, whose name was Matty Shanahan, spread out the blue and white jackets to dry on the flat-topped boulder.

'*Bovver*,' Mac said, feeling in his pocket, 'I declare my three matches has got quite wet, too. I suppose now all the fire's washed out of them, and how are we to cook the troutses if we get some bites that sticks on?'

'If it's a fire,' Matty said, 'we do be sometimes gettin' the loan of a light off a man goin' by wid a pipe. But there's no sticks, unless you look up yonder under the trees. And I never heard tell of any troutses catchin' in it at all.'

'What'll we be cooking, then?' said Aylmer, who was only half reconciled to the loss of his hat, and disposed to make difficulties.

'Oh—potatoes,' Mac said cheerfully, though he did not really think this a satisfactory substitute. 'Do you happen to know if there are many about here?'

'Sorra a pitaty we've in it this long while now,' said Matty; 'sure, we had the last of them ate before Easter.'

'Then why on earth don't you get some more?' said Mac.

'How at all,' said Matty, 'when the rest of them wasn't fit to throw to the hins? And ne'er a one saved for seed, because where'd be the sinse, me

father was sayin', of puttin' them down, wid the whole of us starvin' fast while they would be growin' slow? But frettin' he is now every day, since he was took sick, sittin' on the wall, to see the bit of land lyin' empty under the weeds as yella as gold—frettin' bad he is.'

'Well, but one must be cooking something; and it's getting pretty late,' Aylmer remarked sternly.

'Sure, it isn't hardly hungry-time yit, glory be to goodness!' said Matty. 'And I was telling you me mother's had no cowld pitaties to be givin' us to take along wid us, and we grazin' the little goat, or else yous 'ud be welcome to a bit. When we had them, we did be warmin' them up grand wid a fire lightin' in there under the trees. Only yous had a right to not be burnin' your fingers grabbin' at them, the way Rosy done, instead of rowlin' them out wid a stick.'

'You don't explain properly; people must have enough to eat whether there are cold potatoes or not,' said Mac politely but decidedly.

Matty stared at him blankly. 'You are a quare one,' she said. 'Has any people ever enough to eat?'

'Well, if they want to go on for ever and ever and ever, they must be great *pigs*,' Mac said, with severity.

'When I've got joggolates,' Aylmer said reflectively, 'I always *do* want to go on for ever and ever and all the evers that ever were.'

Matty continued to look puzzled. 'Now and again,' she said, after a pause, 'we lights a fire, and sticks a few biggish-sized round stones in it by way of pitaties roastin'. But that's only lettin' on, and

most whiles we go to the wishin' well above there in the wood for our bit of dinner.'

'I didn't know there was anything except water in wells,' said Aylmer.

'She said a *wishing* one, didn't you hear?' Mac said, intending to convey an entirely false impression that this made the matter quite clear to him.

'Saint Brigid owns it,' said Matty. 'Grand she is. I seen her picture below at Father Christy's, in an illigant white gown streelin' after her, and a sort of gould sunbonnet blowin' out flat off the back of her head. And they say that if you drop a little bit of anythin' into the wather to remind her, she'll send you whativer you're wishin' for. So Rosy and I do be wishin' a bit of dinner off of her.'

'And what does she send you?' Mac enquired, with interest.

Aylmer murmured hopefully: 'Joggolates, maybe.'

'Nothin',' Matty replied disappointingly. 'But you never can tell she mightn't take the notion to some day. Rosy and I'll be slippin' up presently.'

'We'll come along,' said Mac.

''Deed yous might better,' said Matty, 'than to be drownin' of yourselves fightin' on the edge of the deep pool. The bits of coateens can be dryin' here till we come back. I'll tether the little goat the way she won't get swallyin' them.'

The footpath to the well wound up with a cool shade of green leaves above and, below, a soft paving of dead ones, crossed here and there by roots which made irregular steps in it. Mac accounted for his tripping over them by saying that they were a different pattern from the stairs in most places. How-

ever, all the children scrambled safely up to St. Brigid's well, niched in its rounded rock basin under the high steep bank. Moss, which seemed a golden-green light among the flickering shadows, muffled its brim, and from the crevicced stones behind it harebells trembled and harts-tongue drooped. Large shining drops swelled at the points of the long leaves, and splashed down slowly one by one as if a string of beads were broken into the clear water, which they kept astir with a sliding circling ripple. The little girls crossed themselves, and began to say some queer-sounding words, which were Latin, Matty explained to Mac; but she could not answer him satisfactorily when he wanted to know further; what they meant?—a question which might have puzzled the most scholarly—whether savages spoke Latin? and whether Saint Brigid was a savage?

'I don't see how I 'm to order dinner that way,' he said, 'because I happen not to remember the Latin for anything to eat.'

'Sure, how could she help knowin' right enough what pitaties is?' Matty said.

'And a sup of buttermilk,' Rosy whispered at her elbow.

'Is that all you're going to order?' said Mac. 'Why, that's only a little bit of a dinner—there's lots of other things.'

'Joggolates!' suggested a familiar husky voice beside him.

'I will *not* order chocolate,' said Mac; 'I know very well that she'd say it wasn't wholesome enough for people's dinners.'

'I'd liefer have pitaties than stirabout,' said

Matty. 'The yella male's a quare, ugly brash, and there doesn't be more than a little dab of it for everybody when it's boiled. Me mother mostly has only the pot scrapin's, but she says it's plenty. Pitaties is the best.'

'Roast chicken,' said Mac, 'and mashed potatoes, and cold apple pie and custard might do. What shall I drop in?'

'Thim little thimbles off of the fir-tree is handy, if you haven't e'er a pin or a button,' Matty said. And several small cones were found without difficulty.

Aylmer dropped one in unobserved, and as he did so murmured: 'Joggolates!'

. . . . . .

For nearly an hour after the children had gone into the wood, nobody came next or nigh the lough. Then over the brow of the steep grassy slope, and down the same path that Mac and Aylmer had taken, came a figure all in soft white, just tinted with a delicate lilac, as are some crocus cups. Softly white, too, and plumed with faintly tinted feathers, was the large hat which shaded her golden-brown hair. So that she made a very high light in the strong sunshine as she passed through it. She was carrying a small hamper. Anybody who had met her might have noticed that the lowest flounce of her pretty dress was a little bedraggled along its lacy edge, and that her pretty face looked a little unhappy and perplexed. The facts were that she had driven over from Glenamber to bring a share of some wedding festivities to the exiles at Sheenagh House, where, arriving, she had found it deserted,

for its master was out, and the servants had slipped down to M'Queen's place, at the cross-roads, in hopes of a glimpse when the bridal carriage drove by honeymoon-wards. Only old Moriarty was by this time scraping in front of the house, and told her how he had seen the young gentlemen a while ago in the shrubbery yonder, on their way to the lough, he'd be bound, as they were carrying the master's old fishing-rod. 'And you'll be apt to meet them comin' back by now, miss,' he added, 'unless they're after drowndin' theirselves—that's no ways too unlikely.'

'Is it far?' she asked.

'Sure not at all,' he said. 'You might sling an ould cabbage-stump into it from the end of the bit of a grove.' And on the strength of this she had started. But she was not used to bogs, and consequently had the imprudence to step on a jewel-green mossy patch, with results harmful to her dainty bridesmaid's attire and little silver-buckled shoes. This accident caused her some vexation, but she forgot all about it when she reached the lough, for as she ran down the grass slope the first thing she noticed was a straw hat floating on the water, and a few steps further brought her where she found two pairs of long stockings and two pairs of small boots lying on the top of a flat stone. No living creature was in sight except a white goat tethered and grazing; and the thought flashed into her mind that the wearers of these things must have been the little boys she had come to look for; a conjecture which made old Moriarty's seem dreadfully probable. In a great fright she ran along the edge of the water,

calling 'Mac—Aylmer'; and presently she was still more alarmed by a gleam of something blue and white a little way from the shore. It was Aylmer's jacket, which Matty had so carefully spread to dry, and which a breeze had whisked regardlessly into the water. But to Amy Barry it seemed likely to be something so terrible that she was afraid to look at it, and dropping her hamper on the grass, she fled panic-stricken down the lane in search of help.

Very soon after she had gone the four children descended the shadowy path between the tree trunks, and stepped out again upon the sunny green margin—four as wild small figures, in their ragged wrappings, as you could have met in the width of Connaught. The little boys had wanted to linger up at the well, imagining their wishes more likely to be fulfilled upon the spot, but Matty, speaking with the authority of a much longer experience, assured them that Saint Brigid 'was just as apt to leave them their dinners down below'; and at last persuaded them to come and see. She was anxious to reclaim her sacks and resume her grass-cutting. And, 'I declare to goodness,' Mac exclaimed, as they emerged from the wood, 'she's left it in a basket. There it is near the big stones. Come along, and look what's in it.'

'Musha, good gracious! and there it is sittin' wid itself sure enough,' Matty said. 'Where's it come from at all—unless it 's from herself? A grand new little hamper.'

'If there's *all* our dinners in it,' Aylmer remarked discontentedly, when they had raced up to the

hamper, 'it doesn't look very big. The plates 'ill take up nearly all the room.'

'Of course she knows perfitly well that savages don't want plates,' said Mac, who was fumbling with the fastenings. 'Which way do you pull the little peggy thing—do you know, Matty?'

'Suppose somebody owns it,' Matty said, hanging back; 'and suppose the polis was comin' along the road there, and we meddlin' with it.' Matty's eyes were visibly enlarged and darkened by the horror of the imagined situation.

'Savages and saints isn't any affair of the polis *at all*,' Mac said, prescribing the constabulary their duties without hesitation, and throwing back the hamper lid with a creaky jerk: 'Whoof! Is it nothing but old flowers?'

On the top, indeed, lay some sprays of white frosted blossoms, tied with wonderful silvery satiny knots and bows. Mac flung them down on the grass disdainfully, but Matty and Rosy picked them up reverentially, as if they were feathers from an angel's wing. Under them was a paper bag full of small sugary biscuits of all shapes and hues; and these the boys regarded with more respect. Then there came thick slices of dark plum cake iced and almonded, and a number of softly flushed peaches, and a heavy bunch of bloomy purple grapes. Next, an oval card box of glistening crystallised fruits; and, lastly, a round one of bonbons. 'Joggolates!' Aylmer said triumphantly, on seeing these, 'and it was me ordered them. But you can have ones a piece.'

When all these things were spread out on the

grass, Mac said: 'Let's have the biscuits first. You needn't grab them with your two hands at once, Aylmer, like a wolf.'—Aylmer, with his mouth full, said something indistinctly about savages.—'Come along, Matty and Rosy.'

But Matty turned away, drawing her old shawl closer about a disconsolate face. 'They're not our dinners, for sartin,' she said; 'ne'er a pitaty is there at the bottom—ne'er a one. But belike she might send them another day, Rosy, when there's nobody in it, only you and me. Themselves is some manner of Quality, so she wouldn't be mindin' the likes of us. It's time we got the grass cut. Come along, Rosy. Say "No thankee."'

Rosy, however, on the contrary, said: 'Plase,' and accepted a handful of miniature stars and crowns and crescents, pink and white and yellow, at which she looked for a minute half doubtfully. It seemed like eating up things that were almost too pretty to touch. But after she had tasted the first sparing crumb, the rest very rapidly vanished. Matty also was tempted irresistibly by a rose-and-apricot-coloured cockleshell, which Mac would have her take. It held cream, flavoured with something delicious; yet before it was finished she stopped as if she had remembered a trouble, and suddenly looked ready to cry. She was thinking of some people in a dark house-room not very far off, and this made her glance in the direction of the road leading to it. And her glance grew into a stare, for just then round the corner ran a figure whose white robes swept after her over the grass—one flounce was torn and trailing—as softly as foam, and whose

bright head had a covering not in the least like any of the caps and hoods Matty was used to see. The feathery brim had got pushed far back in her haste, showing a fluff of golden hair and a flower-tinted face. 'Bedad, then it *was* herself brought them their dinner,' Matty said, in an awe-stricken tone, while Rosy edged up to her, grasping a handful of her shawl, as if for protection, and both little girls began to retreat.

It was really the bringer of the hamper, who, having met with young Lambert May on his bicycle, and sent him speeding to fetch assistance, had now been drawn back by the fascination of fear to the lough side. The sight of the four ragged children there gave her a hope and dread of news, as she hurried up to the little girls with eager questions.

'Be curtseyin', Rosy, be curtseyin',' Matty meanwhile was exhorting. 'Saints is a great sort of Quality.'

'Do you know anything, please, about the hat floating there in the water?' said the stranger.

'Ay, miss—Saint Brigid,' Matty said, curtseying extraordinarily low; 'it fell off the little boy's head, and he fightin' with the other. There's the two of them now,' and she pointed to Mac and Aylmer squatting by the hamper in their sacks.

'Oh,' the stranger said, looking much relieved. 'And did you happen to see two other little boys in blue and white sailor suits anywhere about?'

'Ay, did I,' said Matty.

'And where did they go to?'

'There's the two of them now at their dinners,'

Matty said, pointing again to the figures by the hamper.

'Those poor children! Are you quite sure? Why, they seem to have hardly any clothes.'

'Sure, there's the little coat of one of them in the water, too,' said Matty. 'It's about drowndin' himself dead he was raichin' after the hat, so I got him out of it, and we loaned him the ould sack while it would be dryin', but it's fell in again.' Matty had no wish to deceive; but her language was ambiguous, and it conveyed to her hearer the impression that she had rescued the child from a watery grave. She was astonished when this beautiful young lady, 'and herself a saint,' said: 'Then you are a *very* good little girl, and I'm very much obliged to you indeed.' It seemed to her that since she was in such favour, she might perhaps venture to put in a word about the potatoes so often bespoken in vain. But just as she was beginning: 'If you plase, Miss—Saint Brigid, ma'am ——' Saint Brigid ran away to speak to the little boys.

Mac, when he saw her approaching, kicked Aylmer, and said: 'It's just a girl dressed up; we needn't mind about being savages to her.' But Aylmer had too many chocolate drops in his mouth to have room for any words.

'So you found the hamper, I see,' the girl said, which seemed to Mac such an obvious remark that he ignored it, and replied: 'You're quite welcome to some of these biscuits. I think the white ones are the best.'

'I thought you'd like them,' she said. 'I hope

the grapes aren't crushed; I brought the biggest bunch I could find.'

'Did Saint Brigid send you?' said Mac.

'Saint Brigid? Oh, no. What do you mean?'

'If she didn't, I don't see how you could be thinking anything about it,' said Mac. 'I ordered our dinners up there at the well, because we haven't caught anything yet except bites, and we can't go back to the house until it's ever so late in the evening. And I ordered chicken and mashed potatoes, but I s'pose she forgot it, I wish she hadn't, for I'm pretty hungry, and we *have* to be staying here.'

'Why?' said the girl, looking puzzled.

'Because of a nasty aunt that's coming this afternoon,' said Mac; 'so we've went away to live wild like savages till she's gone. But I dare say the old pest will stay *bovvering* there till it's quite dark. People you don't want are always everywhere.'

'And taking one to school, and asking one the dates of the kings and queens and things,' came in a grumbling mumble, for Aylmer's mouth was still full. 'I wish they'd all died the same time, and I wish plaguy old aunts would go and see somebody else.'

'Well, I'm sorry you both think so badly of aunts,' said the girl, 'for I believe I am your Aunt Amy. But I don't know any dates myself.'

'Nor seven times twice times?' said Aylmer.

'Not without adding up,' she said.

'*She's* nobody's aunt,' Aylmer said to Mac, in a very low whisper; 'you needn't believe it. She *might* be Saint Brigid, for they said she had white

clothes; but she's no more like an aunt than I am.'

'Well, you needn't bellow at the top of your voice —she'll hear you,' Mac said, giving him an indignant shove, which Aylmer returned. Their aunt did hear and see, and to change the subject said: 'I hope you offered the little girls something?'

'They're wanting potatoes,' said Mac, 'because they and their mother haven't had anything this long while except pot scrapings of *yella male*—that's what she called it, and it can't be very nice. But they wouldn't take our things—only a few biscuits.'

'They do look half-starved, poor children,' she said. 'And, by the way, which of you was it who got so nearly drowned? You ought really to come home and change your things.'

'We weren't either of ourselves nearly drowned, only our hats,' said Mac; 'people shouldn't exaggelate about nothing at all.'

'Oh, they've been telling tales, have they?' Aylmer said, frowning all over his dirty round face. 'Then they may do without any of my joggolates that I ordered. *Now* I won't keep a single one for them.'

'Pig!' said Mac.

The girl in white gathered up some slices of plum-cake and ran off with them after Matty and Rosy, who had gone to untether the goat. She had scarcely reached them, when she heard shrill voices arising behind her, and she looked round, thinking that the threatened hostilities had broken out. But she saw that two tall, black-looking policemen had arrived, and that one of them was talking to the

little ragged boys. Mac seemed to be answering him with fluent defiance; but Aylmer suddenly jumped up, and fleeing towards her, still clutching his box of chocolate, grasped her skirts with a hand which left its mark and began to roar. The policeman following him, said: 'Beg pardon, miss, but did you know them childer was making free with your hamper of sweets?'

'They're my nephews,' she said, and Aylmer made no attempt to repudiate the connection. So the policeman withdrew, apologetic and rather scandalised. 'That was a queer start,' he said to his comrade, as they walked away. 'A one of them was eatin' that rapacious I thought he was starvin', and I come as near as anything takin' him in charge. They hadn't the look of belongin' to anybody respectable.'

The constables were hardly out of sight when there appeared on the scene Lambert May, bringing with him the doctor, and several men with ropes and poles, and Father Daly, and quite a crowd of children and women, some of whom had already begun to say that the poor little crathurs' mother was to be pitied that night when she heard what had happened them. But their Aunt Amy really was to be pitied, in a less tragical way, when she had to explain that nothing had happened to them at all. For she felt ashamed of the commotion roused by her false alarm, and did not like to think how foolish she must appear to Lambert May. Altogether it did seem hard that she should have given up a garden party, and spoiled her new gown, only to frighten and make herself ridiculous, and to be disowned

with contempt by her relations. Moreover, her disreputable-looking nephews proceeded to behave so badly that she felt quite abashed, and they talked so strangely about savages and Saint Brigid that she almost thought they must be demented. Mac, especially, being hungry and fractious, stamped furiously in a puddle when requested to put on his boots and stockings, and declared that he wasn't going to be ordered about by people who came bothering and pretending they were everybody's aunts. His good-humour was not restored until he had been invited thoroughly to inspect Lambert May's highly-polished roadster, and even to sit on the saddle and see how entirely out of reach the pedals were. By the time that she had helped him to lace his boots, it is true, he had begun to take a more tolerant view of his aunt's character. But when he said good-bye to her at the gate he gave her a bit of, no doubt, mortifying intelligence.

'The man with the bicycle thinks you are very horrid,' he said.

'How do you know?' she asked.

'Because,' said Mac, 'when he was showing it to me, I asked him if he thought you were *his* aunt, and he said: 'Oh no, indeed, she's not my aunt, *thank goodness!*' But next time I see him, I'll tell him you aren't as nasty as most aunts—unless,' Mac continued interrogatively, 'you maybe aren't one at all, and only letting on, the same way that we were about the savages?'

There was one person, however, to whom the afternoon seemed ending in a sudden blaze of joy. Matty Shanahan just about that time was rushing

home through shade and shine at the top of her speed. Such a pace did she attain that Rosy M'Clonissy, following with the little goat in tow, and daring not to be left behind, tugged and panted, and called injunctions to stop, and to come on. Matty never heeded. For she was on her way to give her mother the wonderful golden sixpenny-bit that the lovely young lady—some sort of Quality or Saint—had run after her to put into her hand.

A MAGPIE'S NEST

A GENERATION ago, Matthew Gallaher of Stack's Hill built four cabins on the triangular bit of waste land between the pound and the stone-pits at Glasranny. Felix Doogan, a neighbouring farmer, had said that there wouldn't be rightly room for more than three little houses on it; but Matthew was a man who prided himself upon going his own way in all circumstances—even when they seemed to post up No Thoroughfare very plainly; so now, having made up his mind to build four cottages, four he built, all the more resolutely for the opinion which, he said, Felix 'had took upon himself to promulgate.' The Stack's Hill harvest had prospered that year; he had the money in hand; and he naturally wished to make the most of a scrap of land that was useless for any other purpose. Felix's obtruded opinion, however, was, as it happened, correct; and the cabins had to be planned on an unusually skimpy scale, while, in spite of their cramped proportions, a swampy patch made it necessary to turn the fourth one at right-angles to the other three, in a way not originally intended. It had to be huddled, moreover, into such an incommodious corner that 'at the heel of the hunt,' Andy Rooney said, 'there was no size on it to spake of'; and Mick

Keogh said it was like 'the wizendy pea at the end of a crooked pod.' In reality it was quite diminutive enough to barb with fact Felix Doogan's sarcastic remark that 'Matt Gallaher was about buildin' a fine big hin-house at all events'; and when, shortly afterwards, a feud set in between these two, one could always tell to which faction a neighbour adhered by noticing whether he spoke of the new cottages as 'the three row' or 'the four row.' Later on, when the feud had died down, they were called by everybody 'the Quarry Cottages,' a neutral name, which they retain to this day. A more important and more permanent result of Matthew's obstinacy was that the singular smallness of the cabins hindered him from finding for them such desirable tenants as he had expected. His ploughman, who might, he had thought, have conveniently occupied one of them, declined on the grounds that 'eight childer would be everywhere and nowhere entirely in the little room'; and for similar reasons they were avoided by all persons who had large families and were earning fair wages. Only people who did not wish, or could not afford, to hire more than most straitened lodging, took up their quarters there, on perforce moderate terms. The tiny end-house in particular was destined to become the abode of a series of lone widdies, crippled pensioners, and the like, from whom a few weekly pence was all that could be, and more sometimes than would be, forthcoming for rent. Residence in it was looked upon as a mark of very great poverty. Thus Matthew Gallaher's wilfulness was its own reward, and he had secretly to own that he would have made a better

thing of it, from a pecuniary point of view, if he had built three 'sizeable' cabins. His indigent and insolvent tenants, on the other hand, might have found it more difficult to accommodate themselves if he had displayed less tenacity of purpose; so that the ill-seeming wind retrieved its character proverbially.

Some few years since, the Quarry Cottages were occupied by a rather typical set of tenants. At one end of the row lived the Widdy Welsh, with three small children, whom she supported by field work at ninepence a day, and out-door relief, which the Union van brought weekly in the shape of loaves and tea. She had to gather up great heaps of stones and weeds, and shake out endless swathes of drying grass, and bind innumerable sheaves of top-heavy grain, to earn her ninepences, whereas the loaves and tea were left without any exertion on her part at her door. Yet it may be doubted whether she did not after all pay as high a price for these as if she had bought them with her hardly-won pennies. For she used to say to herself that she was the first of her family who had ever come on the rates. Her next-door neighbours were the M'Guinty family, in which children's heads were nearly as hard to count as a successful brood of chickens bobbing about a handful of dirty oats, but were not nearly so easy to keep fed. Everybody said that Mrs. M'Guinty was to be pitied, and she quite agreed with them. The only other consolation she had was the doubtful one of reflecting how comfortably off they might have been if Himself had kept his good gardener's place, where he had sixteen shillings a week, and a lodge, and

milk and vegetables, instead of taking to the drink, till he was thrust out of that Paradise, and doing odd jobs in the fields for low wages, which mostly went to Corcoran's public. But as it was, she had to take in washing, when she could get any, and send their eldest boy Jim to crow-scaring instead of school. On the other side of the M'Guintys dwelt old Johnny Toole, with his wife and his widowed daughter, Ellen Jennings, and her son Thomas. Old Johnny was paralysed, and Thomas was lame, so that the household's resources consisted mainly of the five shillings weekly allowed to Mrs. Jennings by the railway company in whose service her husband had perished, and the poultry she kept, and the socks she knitted. Thomas occasionally picked up miscellaneous sixpence-bearing occupations, in spite of his crippled leg, and was just beginning to acquire a name locally for luckiness in the treatment of ailing cattle. These people, with a few chickens and ducks, and the Welshes' tabby cat, and the M'Guintys' black and white cat, were the only residents at this time, for the little end-house had been vacant since the departure of Peter Coleman, the army pensioner, whose cross bull-terrier had cast a menacing shadow over the days of both children and cats.

But towards the end of March it became known that the little house was going to be inhabited again. The tidings, which were brought by Thomas, were rather unwelcome, for the emptiness of the end-house was considered an advantage by everybody more or less. The children liked to be able to pelt its door with resounding stones unblamed; and their elders found it convenient to spread their drying

wash out on the low-hung eaves, which they could not have done had there been a head under the thatch. They were disposed to feel aggrieved, also, by the fact that its occupier, in consequence of its situation, could, as Mrs. M'Guinty said, 'be squintin' through the little window at everythin' that went in or out of their doors,' a surveillance the more annoying because it would probably be carried on by a person of low social status: 'For sure nobody that was anyways very respectable would put up wid the likes of such a weeny doghole.'

Yet when this new tenant had actually arrived, she was not long in conquering the prejudices of her neighbours. She proved to be a middle-aged widow, one Nancy Flannery, daughter to the Lavelles, who lived where Mrs. Welsh came from, and were considered 'very dacint, respectable people whatever.' This was, of course, a strong recommendation to start with, but, like others of its kind, it could not have gone far, after all, had it not been carried on by Mrs. Flannery herself. The most eulogistic testimonials to character, brought with a morose countenance and ungracious bearing, would have faintly influenced opinion at the Quarry Cottages, where, however, the new-comer's appearance and manners produced a highly favourable impression. Her good-looking and cheerful face corresponded right well with her speech and actions, which were pleasant and sensible and kindly. She seemed to be a woman who could turn her hand to most things, and to have a disposition that made this fortunate for her neighbours as well as herself, the hand's-turns she so constantly did including many a

good one for some other person, in addition to those whereby she eked out her own livelihood, with the help of remittances from an emigrant brother. But if there had been nothing else, her conversational gift alone would have insured her popularity. It was a talent bestowed by nature, not acquired nor cultivated by any conscious art, though some practised skill and adroitness must undoubtedly have co-operated with the keen observation, quick sympathy, and sensitive tact that enabled her to be all things to all men in discourse. Her judgment was shown, not only in the choice of subjects, but in the point of view adopted. Thus, to the Widdy Welsh, whose mind was much taken up with Mick, and Lizzie, and Terry—especially Terry, because he was sickly and fractious—her talk would be about children, and the propensity manifested by the ailing, cranky little ones for growing up 'as big and strong *agin* as the others.' With old Mrs. Toole, a poultry fancier, she discussed 'chuckens,' making particular and appreciative reference to a cherished Cochin China cock. Mrs. Flannery had never heard anything to equal the crow of him. Bedad, now, it was powerful enough to call a parish to Mass, and a dale more dependable than a clock; she always set hers by it. But when entertaining old Johnny, whose tastes were political and literary, she would be equally enthusiastic about the proclaimed meeting at Kilmorrough, or the verses in the top right-hand corner of the *Saturday Herald*. For poor Mrs. M'Guinty she abounded in encouraging cases she had heard tell of where men, long given to drink, had taken a turn against it, and lived ever after 'as

studdy as the stars in the sky.' Even Pat M'Guinty himself, on the rare occasions when he was at home, moping in his sad and sober senses, would rouse into some animation if she set him off on his favourite topic, which happened to be tulips. In general company she was always well provided with acceptable contributions to the conversation, to which they added an element of good-humoured gaiety, so that her intervention often came like a sudden veering of the wind from east to west with a lifting cloud.

The effect of these things began to make itself felt from the very earliest moments of her first arrival, seated in Jerry Bourke's sand-cart, which Thomas Jennings was driving back unloaded from Stack's Hill, whither he had been summoned to see a sick calf. On his homeward way he had overtaken her plodding along with a big bundle and a small box, and had offered her what might be called a loan of a loan of a lift, as that was all the share he possessed in the cart, at the bottom of which its proprietor lay comfortably asleep. Mrs. Flannery gratefully climbed up beside Thomas Jennings, and dropped her box and bundle into the cart behind them, carefully enough not to disturb Jerry Bourke, who only dreamt of an unusually violent jolt; and thus she arrived safely at her new residence. She had never seen it before, and, truth to say, was rather shocked by its meagre dimensions, when Thomas pointed it out to her, adding: 'It 's not very big, ma'am.' However, she showed no dissatisfaction. 'Sure not at all,' she answered as she alighted, 'why would it? We 've got as much bigness as we want, and more, quite convanient, just t' other side of the

door.' On her way to this negatively spacious mansion she had to traverse a small battlefield, where an eddy of little fighting Welshes and M'Guintys whirled with yells, regardless of their mothers, who shrieked peremptory peace proposals, each from her threshold. But Mrs. Flannery, passing by, casually remarked that 'if she had seen any dacint, quiet little childer about, she might have asked them to gather her a few sticks to light up her bit of fire, the way she might be heating a cake of griddle-bread she had brought along with her.' And a cessation of hostilities and dispersion of combatants immediately followed. It was the first of many occasions on which her appearance created a diversion in the interests of tranquillity.

Now, from the very outset and onwards, there was one exception to the general approval of Mrs. Flannery, which extended to the neighbourhood round and about these isolated Quarry Cottages. The dissenter was Mrs. Jennings, who no sooner set eyes on Nancy Flannery than she felt certain that she herself would never like a bone in her skin. She would have found it hard to assign any reason for that conviction, and she never attempted to do so. In fact she gave no overt expression to her adverse opinion, being by nature indisposed to assert herself against her neighbours, even in matters of taste. But her dislike smouldered on unsmothered by want of ventilation, much as a sod of peat keeps its hot pink embers alive among the white ashes all the longer for the want of stirring. Amid the circumstances it was inevitable that jealousy should form an element in her unspoken grudge. When an

ingrata persona becomes the object of enthusiastic eulogy not merely among all one's acquaintances but under one's own roof, the glances of the green-eyed monster sparkle so brightly that its presence can hardly be concealed, no matter how secretly it may lurk. And here Mrs. Jennings had father, mother, and son unanimous in encomium. If its theme had been younger, her jealousy would no doubt have blazed out more fiercely on account of her Thomas, but as Nancy Flannery was a contemporary of her own, the passion did not rise to that high temperature, even when she saw him most deeply engrossed in a disquisition upon the luckiness of marshmallows as a stupe in cases of sprains and spavins.

One hot afternoon in the late summer, about a year and a half after Mrs. Flannery's arrival, the grown-up inhabitants of the Quarry Cottages were for the most part sitting on a dusty bank fronting the row, in the slowly spreading shadow of two round-topped elder-bushes. They had all been at Mass and had their dinner, which left the remainder of the day free from engagements, and the nature of their ordinary occupations made sitting quiet a pleasure in itself, all the completer of course if flavoured by a pipe and a little neighbourly gossip. While the shadows were still short, this group was joined by Mrs. Jennings, who had stayed behind in the village after Mass to visit an invalid friend. Her walk home had been long and warm ; unnecessarily warm, because she had worn about her throat a thick woollen scarf, which was far from suitable to the sultry state of the atmosphere. But she could

not forbear to put it on. It was a somewhat new and fondly-cherished possession, having been sent to her from Canada by her married emigrant daughter. Both maternal and artistic feeling made it precious to her: the goodness of Maggie, 'the crathur,' for thinking of her, and the beauty of its green-and-violet stripes and open-work border. The ends were fringed, and from every third loop dangled a little yellow wool shamrock, which was considered a finishing touch of wonderful charm. So she had wound it round her neck with a pride which would not allow her to remove it as long as she was to any extent in public. Here, however, she was glad to discard it, and as she sat down by Mrs. Toole, she folded it carefully into a small roll.

Just at this time, Mrs. M'Guinty was lamenting, as she had often done in the past week or two, a calamity which had fallen upon her in the loss of a navy-blue cotton blouse out of her wash for the doctor's household. That was a piece of patronage lately granted, and now she feared likely to be soon withdrawn, for how could she produce the missing blouse, when she had searched vainly high ways and low ways, and was obliged to believe that some passing vagrant had 'snapped it up, out dryin', and took off wid himself'? And by bad luck, Mrs. M'Guinty said, it was one of Miss Maud's. If it had been Miss Connie, she wouldn't have so much minded; but Miss Maud was like a weasel after any thing belonging to her, and she 'd be infuriated. So nothing would suit them but to take that. 'Them tramps is *awful* people,' Mrs. Welsh said, in a tone of solemn conviction, as if impressed by this

instance of their callous want of consideration. Then Mrs. Flannery related some of her experiences with them, several years back, when she was living quite alone in a solitary sort of place.

'Me little house,' she said, 'was at the one end of the long lane all be itself, like a button droppin' off the end of a thread, and the lane was as lonesome as the waves of the say. There 'd be as much thravellin' along in the bottom of a wet ditch as along it. But anythin' that did come was mostly tramps. So whenever I would be lookin' down the straight stretch of it, and I seen the signs of anythin' stirrin' away at the far ind, "Saints above," I 'd say to meself, "if yon 's nobody better than I 'm expectin', I wish it was the back of him I was lookin' at." And sure enough, very presently into a tramp he 'd turn, slingein' along, wid a lump of a thick stick as like as not, fit to be crackin' the skull of you as aisy as an egg-shell. So wid that, into the house I 'd run for me life, and fasten up the door that had a grand strong bolt on it; and the sorra a knock or a roar would I let on to be hearin', not if he was kickin' the soles of his ould brogues off of them agin it. But one powerful wet day, Mrs. Toole, ma'am, when I was sittin' inside be me fire, all of a suddint I heard a step comin' up close to the door, for be raison of the road bein' soft wid mud ne'er a sound would there be till it was nearly passin'. So up I lep' to be shuttin' the door, but 'deed I wasn't quick enough to git beforehand wid me fine gintleman, and he a most notorious-lookin' villin, and stickin' in his fut to hinder me of slammin' the door in his ugly face.'

'Be good to us all! That showed the sort he was,

sure enough,' said Mrs. M'Guinty. 'And what did you do, ma'am?'

'Sure now, I opened the door a bit wider,' said Mrs. Flannery, 'and says I to him, did he happen to see e'er such a thing as a mad dog. "Murdher, woman," says he, wid a jump in sideways, "is there a one along on this road?" says he, "and which way was it goin'?" says he. "Ne'er a one there is on the road at all," says I, "but there's a big yella tarrier after runnin' in here a little while ago, and sittin' he is be the fire inside there ever since, wid a quare sort of grin on him I don't like the appearance of be any manner of manes, and a growl runnin' through him like the windin' up of a clock, if you move hand or fut. Fearful of disturbin' him I am" says I, "but maybe if you didn't mind takin' a look in at him, you could tell is it mad the baste of a brute is, or only savage like. Just step in," says I to him. But I give you me word, ma'am, it's not stoppin' he was to be passin' any of his remarks to me, before he was peltin' away off down the road as if he'd got a minyit's start of all the mad dogs in Ireland. Bedad, the puddles did be splashin' up over the crown of his ould hat. So that was the way I managed *him*.'

'More power!' said old Toole, and his grandson Thomas chuckled appreciatively.

'And the mad tarrier?—oh, I see—there wasn't e'er a one in it all the while,' said the Widdy Welsh, who was always rather stiff-jointed about picking up ideas. 'Well now, ma'am, you were the great woman to think of it. Long enough I'd ha' been before such a lie come into me stupid head.'

'*I* wouldn't call it any great thing to say: "How ready you are to make a lie and tell it," and that's all it comes to,' said Mrs. Jennings. '*I'd* liefer let lies alone, if it was me.'

'Sure, what better could she ha' done at all?' said Mrs. Toole.

'Bedad, then, it's very often yourself did be sayin' to us when we were childer: "Show me a liar, and I'll show you a thief"; 'twas a great sayin' wid you,' her daughter urged upbraidingly.

'People do be talkin' a dale of quare thrash in their time,' old Mrs. Toole explained with a serene countenance.

'Mad dogs is no kind of thing to be tellin' lies about in my opinion,' said Mrs. Jennings, that opinion being confirmed by the reprehensible backsliding of her parent. 'It was enough to bring a judgment on the house.'

'Sure, I dunno what judgment would be worser in a house,' said Mrs. M'Guinty, 'than the likes of such a miscreant gettin' into it to be wreckin' and murdherin'?'

'It's foolishness talkin' about lies as if they was all the one thing,' said Johnny Toole, 'when there's as much differ in them as can be consaived. Good and bad they are, accordin' as may happen. But sorra a bit of harm there was in Mrs. Flannery's, I'll go bail.'

And his grandson Thomas said, 'Judgments be bothered.'

Thereupon Mrs. Jennings, finding herself discountenanced by both young and old, desisted from further protest, and by and by retreated indoors,

'none too well plased, whatever put her out,' as the Widdy Welsh commented to Mrs. M'Guinty.

If judgments were concerned in the matter, they apparently went wrong somehow; for the very next calamity that occurred at the Quarry Cottages befell not the complacent deluder of tramps, but her more scrupulous censor. That evening, when she put away her Sunday clothes in the old candle-box which formed her wardrobe, Mrs. Jennings missed, with much dismay, her treasured scarf. She did not at first apprehend anything more serious than that she had dropped it out of her hand where she was sitting on the bank, which was quite sufficiently distressing, for she could not bear to think of it lying on the dusty grass, to be trodden on, perhaps, by children and chickens. But when, upon running hastily out to fetch it in, not a sign of it was there to be fetched, her grief became acute indeed. She was as sure as that she had a distracted head on her shoulders of having taken the scarf off just after she sat down, and the neighbours testified to the same effect. Nevertheless, she trudged back along the road to the village with a forlorn hope, which proved, of course, quite vain. The scarf had disappeared. It was most mysterious, everybody said, for no stranger had been seen anywhere about, to be suspected of meddling with derelict property. Mrs. Flannery, moreover, declared that she was certain Mrs. Jennings had had it in her hand when she went into her house; but nobody else had noticed one way or the other. At all events, indoors nor out was any trace of it seen again; and on the succeeding Sundays Mrs. Jennings

attended Mass without undue warmth or vanity. To her it seemed as if a thread, that had stretched across unknown lands and seas all the way from Montreal, had broken with a sudden snap. Her lamentations over the loss were loud and frequent.

But about a month later, a much graver misfortune happened to another of the Quarry cottagers, and this time, Mrs. Jennings thought, with less injustice. It was fine weather half through September, and harvest work was beginning to be plenty, when one evening Pat M'Guinty brought home tidings of how Mrs. Flannery had got a fall off the rick they were building up at Doogan's, and was so badly hurt that she had been conveyed in a cart to the Infirmary at Lambertstown. The news was received with regret, even by Mrs. Jennings, though the 'something not altogether unpleasant' modified her feelings in an unusual degree. All the neighbours concurred in expecting never to see Mrs. Flannery again alive, goodness might pity her; but on the following morning, when Thomas Jennings made his way over to inquire, he learned that although her recovery could not be rapid, her injuries comprising concussion of the brain and a broken leg, it was not by any means hopeless.

For many days he continued his progresses to Lambertstown, impeded by his chronic limp, and accelerated by occasional lifts, only to return with the report that she was 'much the same way.' His bulletins were awaited with interest, but supplied a poor substitute for Mrs. Flannery's own presence and conversation. The weeks after her removal seemed to drag with more than

wonted heaviness and monotony, and the few incidents that diversified them were disagreeable. Mrs. M'Guinty and the Widdy Welsh had words with increasing frequency, perhaps because their opportunities for other kinds of talk were diminished by their neighbour's absence; and the straining of relations between them is apparent in a brief dialogue, which might have been overheard one Saturday forenoon in the course of the following month. The black-looking workhouse van had just appeared at the corner of the lane, which was the fact referred to by Mrs. M'Guinty, who suddenly called loudly from her own doorway to Mrs. Jennings, feeding young ducks close by, 'Musha, good gracious, Mrs. Jennings, ma'am, here's Mrs. Welsh's private carriage comin' home wid her marketin'! Bedad, now, if you and me was gettin' our loaves of bread as chape as some I could name, let alone tay and sugar, it's ourselves could afford to be throwin' out the big heels of loaves, and the long crusts of bread to the hins, the same as other people, and a scandal it is to see it.' Mrs. Welsh and Mrs. M'Guinty were 'not spakin'' just then, because the younger Welshes had knocked down Mrs. M'Guinty's clothes-line a few days before; so Mrs. Welsh, waiting to receive her dole, now called much louder across the M'Guintys' house, 'Well, to be sure, Mrs. Jennings, ma'am, there's plinty more scandeelious things you might see goin' into a body's door than a couple of loaves of bread to put a bit in the orphant childer's mouths, that hasn't got a father to be drinkin' up their bite and sup on them, worse than the bastes of the field, and streelin' about the counthry makin'

a show of himself.' Even the children quarrelled perceptibly more than usual, and there was no one to suggest humorous endings for their frays.

At length, however, Thomas's reports grew more favourable, until one day he returned with the gratifying intelligence that Mrs. Flannery was very finely indeed, and had been able to see him. 'The botheration she had in her head is cleared out of it altogether,' said he, 'and she says herself she's as sinsible as ever she was in her life. Axin' after all of yous she was. But she's set her heart on me bringin' her over the little wooden, papered box she says she has sittin' behind the door in her place; the matron's after givin' her lave to get it if she likes, and she says there's things in it she's precious of. Rael pleased she was when I tould her we had her door locked, and was keepin' the key. So she bid me tie a len'th of string round the box, the way nobody would be meddlin' wid aught was in it, and fetch it along to her. And I know Jerry Bourke's cart'll be goin' that road early to-morra, so I might make a shift.'

'Set her up,' said Mrs. Jennings, 'herself and her ould box. It's quare notions she has, if she thinks folks has nothin' better to do than to be killin' themselves haulin' her rubbishes of ould traps half over the counthry, whenever she takes it into her head. And as for meddlin' wid them, it's much if she's got e'er a ha'porth that any dacint people would be wastin' their time lookin' at—that she need take upon herself to be givin' directions about ties of string.'

Mrs. Jennings made these remarks in a murmuring mumble, more to herself than to her neighbours,

and if Thomas heard, he did not take cognisance of them, but said, 'Well, I 'll take the door-key, and be fetchin' the box over here, so that I 'll have it ready to hand whenever Bourke's cart will be goin' by in the mornin'.'

This he proceeded to do, and anon everybody who had looked out agog to learn what Thomas Jennings was about, opening Mrs. Flannery's door, saw him emerge from it, carrying the box. It was small, and rather heavy for its size, being of rough and clumsy make, with blue and white fleur-de-lys-patterned wall-paper pasted on its deal sides. And that is all anybody would have seen of it, had not Thomas happened to slip on a greasy streak just at his own door, and in trying to regain his balance, which his lame foot always made him prone to lose, let his burden drop with a crash. It alighted right side up ; and the lid, which was fastened only with a hasp, flew back, disclosing the contents to several curious eyes. Whereat one pair of them opened widely, and gleamed with a mixture of exciting emotions. 'Be all the powers of everythin',' said Mrs. Jennings, 'I declare to goodness if she hasn't got me scarf in it. Well now, but that bangs Banagher!'

'You don't say so?—Och, but there it is,' said the Widdy Welsh ; 'saw you ever the like?'

'If that woman isn't a brazen thief, get me one,' said Mrs. Jennings, 'and just behould you all she's got stowed away there. 'Deed, we'd a right to be lookin' through them to see is there anybody else's things she's took upon herself to be precious of. I give you my word, ma'am, there's a bit of blue

stuff under it as like as can be to the blouse poor Mrs. M'Guinty was missin' out of her washin' in the summer. Just run inside, Ellen M'Guinty, and tell your mother to step out and look at somethin' here.'

Sure enough, on the top of some miscellaneous wearing apparel lay the violet-and-green striped scarf, fringe and all. Only to Mrs. Jennings's eager eyes there appeared to be a deficiency in the number of shamrocks on the end that was visible, and this made her the more anxious for a nearer view.

'Let me get a hold of it, Tommy,' she said, pushing aside her son, who was standing aghast, and she extended a hasty hand, which he intercepted barely in time, by slamming down the lid, and seating himself upon it.

'Now, what's that for?' she said indignantly. 'Git up out of that, Tommy, and don't be goin' on wid any fool's antics.'

'Fool's antics or no,' said Thomas, 'there isn't anybody goin' to interfere wid anythin' that's inside of this box.'

'To not interfere wid what's belongin' to me own self, that your poor sister Maggie sent over to me? A likely story, bedad. Quit out of me road, till I see whether she has it desthroyed, to the back of stailin' it.'

'How can you tell it's yours at all?' said Thomas, sitting still, 'there's plinty of people owns ould scarfs besides yourself.'

'How can I tell? Amn't I after seein' it there wid me two eyes? How else could one tell anythin'?'

'The same lookin' things is often as different as can be,' said Thomas.

'Sorra the different thing is it except itself, you young gaby, as Mrs. Welsh very well knows—ma'am?'

'Oh, indeed, it is not,' responded Mrs. Welsh.

'And Mrs. M'Guinty's blue body—this fellow won't let you have a sight of it, ma'am, but I 'm ready to swear I seen the livin' moral of it under me scarf.'

'For the matter of that,' said Mrs. M'Guinty, 'thim sort of blue blouses is as common as the clouds in the sky. You couldn't say but she might aisy own one herself right enough.'

''Deed, now, 'twould be a dale better to not be talkin' about robbin' and thievin' before we 're sure it isn't belongin' to the poor woman herself all the while,' said Mrs. Toole.

'And isn't that the very thing I 'm wantin' to do?' said her daughter. 'And how can I, till this young jackass stops makin' a show of himself, and gets out of our way?'

'That 'ud be the best plan,' said Mrs. Welsh, 'to be takin' a look through it.'

'I 'm not goin' to quit out of anybody's way, not a fut,' said Thomas. 'Mrs. Flannery bid me be bringin' it to her just the way I got it; and so I would, only for droppin' it accidental; and so I won't have any people ransackin' and fingerin' it, and passin' remarks, and she not here to explain the raisons of whatever might happen to be inside.'

'The raisons, bedad! Och, there 's no throuble about *thim*, if that 's all that ails you,' Mrs. Jennings

said with sarcasm, 'We'd understand them widout explainin'.'

'It's quare all the same to think why she *would* be takin' any such things,' said Mrs. M'Guinty. 'Sure, she'd know right well she couldn't be puttin' a one of them on her, but we'd notice it. And what addition or benefit are they to her, if she had to be keepin' them ever lyin' up in a box? There's no great raison in that, as far as I can see.'

'And very belike,' said Mrs. Jennings, 'you don't see the raison why an ould rogue of a magpie will be stuffin' up his nest wid all manner of everythin' he can get the chance of thievin', that's no sort of use to him, good, bad or indiff'rint. But so he does, raison or no. And there's plinty of people the very same way, that'll be pickin' up whatever they can lay their hands on, for the sake of villiny, if it's naught else. And the mischief they are to have about a place, and that's a fac', for all to hear other people gabbin' about thim, you might suppose their aqual wasn't in the world, and nobody could get on widout thim, and callin' liars and fools to everybody that says a word agin them—and encouragin' them to stail their poor mother's bits of things'——

''Deed now it's very dreadful altogether; we'll be apt to be missin' a dale of our things, if that's the sort she is,' Mrs. Welsh said, carried away by this eloquence for the moment. Then obstructive reminiscences cropped up: 'But Dr. Cullen said it was Mrs. Flannery saved the life of Terry, when he took bad wid the croup this last spring; for she was the only one, he said, there was an atom of use tellin' what to be doin'. Sure me head was that

moidhered, he might as well ha' been talkin' blathers and nonsinse for any manin' I seen in it. But at all evints Mrs. Flannery sat up wid the crathur two nights hand-runnin', and she that had to be out in the fields weedin' turnips agin sixo'clock; and I as sure as anythin' it was wakin' him we'd be afore that time to-morra. "Sorra a bit of it, ma'am," says she to me, "It's wakin' yourself Terry 'll be the way he has a right to one of these days, you'll see," says she. And it was the truth she said.'

'Ay, bedad! and if she tould that same about me good new scarf, where'd she say it was?' demanded Mrs. Jennings.

'Where it's goin' to stay, if it's in this,' Thomas determinedly said.

'And the best place for it,' said Thomas's grandmother. 'We've no call to be meddlin' or makin' wid her box. 'Twould have an ugly appearance if we was spyin' into it when we got her back turned; and she couldn't tell it happint by accident.'

'Oh, have it your own way,' said Mrs. Jennings, 'and I'll just step down to the polis, and see what they'll say to people shuttin' up other people's property in their boxes accidental—that's what I'll do as sure as I'm standin' on me two feet.' But the very extravagance of this threat made it an ineffective missile. It entirely failed of its mark, and, as she flounced off into her house, nobody for a moment imagined that she intended an expedition to the whitewashed barracks.

. . . . . .

'Well, to be sure, it's a poor case to be dhruv to robbin' and thievin' one's own belongings,' Mrs.

Jennings said to herself, peering furtively round her through almost total darkness. It was late on that same evening, when all the rest of her household were asleep, thus giving her an opportunity for dealing as she would with the small, paper-covered box, which stood behind the door, corded in readiness for an early start on the morrow. Rapidly she fumbled at the fastenings, till she could noiselessly lift the lid, and twitch out the soft, woollen scarf, recognisable in the obscurity by its texture alone. But when she had deftly retied all the knots, she carried her spoil in triumph over to the hearth, where the dim gleams of a smouldering sod enabled her to see as well as feel that she had accomplished her purpose. She had been right, too, she found, about the fringe: a couple of the shamrocks *were* missing, a slight blemish that heightened both her resentment at its theft, and her rejoicing at its recovery without more serious damage from those felonious hands. Whereupon she stole successfully back to bed, with feelings, not unpleasantly compounded, of sinless guilt and a conviction that Thomas would 'be ragin' if he knew what she was after doin',' but that he was very unlikely to find out.

Her triumph, however, was disappointingly brief, and owed its end to her own imprudence. The box travelled off safely to the Infirmary, and for a few days afterwards she derived considerable satisfaction from stealthy glimpses at her rescued treasure. Then one afternoon, when she was indulging unguardedly in that pleasure, she suddenly became conscious that herself and the scarf were under the

amazed and wrathful gaze of her son Thomas, who had just returned from Lambertstown.

'So it 's after stailin' out of her box you are,' he said; 'and herself comin' back on Monday. I 'll be ashamed to show me face where she is.'

'Ashamed, bedad!' Mrs. Jennings said, with rather feeble defiance, 'It 's oncommon little you 've got to do, then. And who 's wantin' you to show it? Herself 's the brazen one to be settin' fut in the place agin.'

'I 've twinty-siven minds,' said Thomas, 'to go out to Maggie.' And with that he limped away. It was the darkest menace he could utter, and although it always seemed to his mother incredibly dreadful, she disbelieved and trembled. The mere sound of the words made her very miserable.

On the Monday Mrs. Flannery did come home, thin, and still lame enough to need a crutch, but apparently as light-hearted as ever. No guilty consciousness of a magpie's hoard seemed to weigh upon her spirits, and she superintended the conveyance of the suspected box into her dwelling with a mien cheerful and quite unabashed. Looking on from the background, Mrs. Jennings witnessed with bitter disapproval the warm reception given to Mrs. Flannery by all her neighbours, who in their gratification at seeing her again had entirely lost sight of the disagreeable incident connected with the contents of her baggage. Mrs. Jennings had the mortification of hearing her own mother assuring Mrs. Flannery that she was heartily welcome home again, because the place hadn't seemed like itself at all ever since she quit out of it, and of seeing her

own Thomas 'runnin' about like a dog at a fair, lame foot and all, the crathur,' to fetch buckets of water, and creels of turf, 'and the dear knows what more besides,' for the benefit of a person whom Mrs. Jennings in her own mind characterised as 'a great little-good-for.' She did not venture to express these sentiments openly in the presence of Thomas. But once in the course of the evening, being pretty sure that the newspaper had absorbed his attention, she could not deny herself the small solace of remarking, as she cleared away the supper plates, upon the necessity for minding where you left things out of your hand now when the magpies were coming about the place again. This, and a marked avoidance of Mrs. Flannery's society, seemed to be the only manifestation of her feeling within her power.

One day, soon after her home-coming, Mrs. Flannery hobbled across to call on Mrs. Welsh, whom she found entertaining Mrs. M'Guinty, their quarrel having blown over. Mrs. Flannery's object was to bring a pair of woollen wristcuffs, which she had crocheted for little Terence, who was afflicted with chilblains in the cold weather. The wristcuffs were worked in violet-and-green stripes, with a yellow border, which was considered most tasty. 'Sure, I just made them,' she said, 'out of the bits I had left over from Mrs. Jennings's scarf.' She stopped herself abruptly and the other two women looked at each other significantly: but she added, after a moment's hesitation: 'You see, I wouldn't be spakin' about it before the Tooles, for fear they might consait I was blamin' anybody, and I well know me box was as safe as a bank while they had

it keepin'. But left standin' it was for a while in the lobby at the Infirm'ry, before they brought it in to me, and there do be plinty of all manner of people goin' about there, so that 's apt to ha' been the way of it. Anyhow, me scarf was gone, clever and clane. Makin' it I was for poor Mrs. Jennings, instead of the one she does be frettin' after. I knew me cousin that 's in the shop at Lisnafoyle had a remnant of the very same coloured wools, she could be lettin' me have; and them pillar and chain stitches take next to no time doin'. I had it finished all to a couple of the little danglin' yella shamrocks, the day that I got the toss off of the ould ladder. So I thought I might ready it up while I was waitin' to come home, and that 's the way it 's went astray on me. So she 's as good as lost it twice over, for it was the very moral of her own one, only, in coorse, it wouldn't be the same thing as if the daughter had sent it. Anyhow, she knows nothin' about it, so there 's no great harm done. But don't let on I tould yous, women dear, or they might be thinkin' bad in there, where to be sure nobody would ha' throubled themselves wid lookin' into me ould box.'

The Widdy Welsh had been listening with widely-opened eyes, and mouth ajar, yet, despite these facilities, the new idea was as usual rather slow in finding access, and she now began to say, in the tone of one upon whom a discovery dawns: 'Bedad thin—sure that would ha' been the one Mrs. Jennings has got all this while, thinkin' it was her own you 'd took.'—When Terry, as luck would have it, made an interruption by spilling a wooden bowlful of soapsuds

in a frothy flood about the floor, which gave Mrs. M'Guinty time for the many signs and whispers needed to prevent the completion of Mrs. Welsh's sentence.

But as soon as ever Mrs. Flannery had taken leave, they both charged headlong into the Tooles' house, where another surprise awaited them. For there they came upon Mrs. Jennings standing with distracted countenance in the middle of the floor, dangling from either hand a violet-and-green striped scarf, and surrounded by her family, who seemed to be in a censorious mood. What had happened was this.—Requiring a bit of string, wherewith to mend the lid of her market-basket, she had put her hand into an old tin canister which stood on the dresser, and in which such things were sometimes to be found. And she had drawn out—what but her own scarf? At the same instant a flash of recollection had brought vividly back to her how, on entering the house that Sunday afternoon, she had perceived the fire to be just dying away, and had dropped the rolled-up scarf out of her hand into the canister for safety, while she saved the life of the expiring embers with a sod of peat. And there it had lain 'from that good day to this.' Her exclamation had now apprised everybody of the event, and everybody having with one accord begun to point out the inexcusableness of her mistake, she had, as a poor attempt at self-defence, produced the other scarf to show the exact similarity that had caused her blunder.

It may be doubted that Mrs. Jennings's embarrassments were in any degree diminished by the ex-

planations which ensued. Doubtful, too, it seems, whether the Widdy Welsh ever attained to any clear comprehension of the situation; but this was the less matter, inasmuch as the belief that Mrs. Flannery had postponed Terry's wake set her character far above the reach of all rash judgments.

Mrs. M'Guinty undertook the restoration of the second scarf to its rightful owner, and accomplished the task discreetly enough. As she started on her mission, Thomas was undutifully observing to his mother: 'I wonder who 's the thievin' magpie *now*.' It was the first in a long series of such taunts, which had not concluded even by the following spring. She therefore considered it a particularly malicious trick of fortune that a pair of magpies should then begin to set about a nest, in the old elm-tree, scarcely a stone's throw away. This proximity she utilised, by inciting the children, with hap'orths of sweets, to pelt the builders so persistently that at last they transferred their operations permanently to a more distant site. 'Glory be,' Mrs. Jennings said to herself, when they ceased to appear, 'and I wisht some I could name was gone along wid them.' But she could, in fact, have named only one.

THE COUNSEL OF WIDDY COYLE

HER neighbours in general were of the opinion that Margaret Sheehan 'thought too much of herself altogether,' and it followed naturally enough that they also considered her to think less than she ought of other people, 'every bit as good as she was, and maybe a bit over.' They accounted for her arrogance in several different ways. Some of them ascribed it to the fact that she had been brought up by an aunt in the town of Cashalcreagh, where she had grown accustomed, as her cousin, the Widdy Coyle said, to 'big shop-windies and every sort of grandeur.' Others believed it was inherited rather than acquired, and reminded themselves that her mother's people, the Brennans, had 'always had the name of bein' very proud.' Again others explained it upon the hypothesis that 'Margaret Sheehan had the notion she was the only dacint-lookin' girl in the parish—herself and her fine braided cape.' These commentators, who were for the most part her contemporaries, frequently added that you 'might aisy find plenty no uglier than she, if that was all that ailed her'; and as they had certainly bestowed more attention than anybody else upon this particular point, they may have been its best qualified judges. But everybody agreed in

taking it for granted that Margaret's pride would be increased by her sister Kitty's marriage. For Kitty Sheehan had lately surprised Bunowen by making a match far above its expectations, Myler Geraghty being the son of a strong farmer, who was actually a Poor Law Guardian, and might one of these days become a Justice of the Peace; while her father, poor Jimmy Sheehan, was merely a fisherman with a small boat, *too* small to accommodate the long family, for which his few drills of pitaties sometimes proved sadly too short between 'plantin' and liftin'.' It was a further remark of her cousin, the Widdy Coyle, that Margaret would be a very foolish girl if she set herself up with the notion of getting a bridegroom equally well-to-do. And upon this text she was wont to relate a warning anecdote about a family of young ladies with whom her own mother had lived in service, and the eldest of whom had married a lord, an alliance which led the other sisters to entertain such exalted ideas of their social prospects that they would not look at a man unless he had a handle to his name. 'And what was the end of that, me dear?' the Widdy would conclude. 'Every single one of the whole half-dozen of them went to her buryin' before there was any talk of her weddin'; 'deed did she—just be raison of givin' themselves airs.'

The Widdy took care that this tale, with its perfectly obvious moral, should be heard repeatedly by her young cousin Margaret Sheehan; and her object herein was her nephew Dan Molloy, and the wife for whom she well knew him to be on the look-out. As Dan was a fisherman, with only a fractional

proprietorship in a middle-sized boat, and responsible for the support of an invalided mother, he could not be deemed a brilliant *parti*. But then he was, his aunt declared, 'as steady as the Rock of Cashel, and near strong enough to lift it, so he'd a right to be doin' finely, no fear, if he didn't by misluck get drownded; and the crathurs must all take their chance of that, accordin' to the will of God.' Moreover, he was her favourite sister's son, in itself a sufficient reason to make her solicitous about his concerns. And the Widdy Coyle was not a person who would by any means be backward in endeavouring to order and settle things as she deemed expedient. Indeed, neighbours had been overheard to pronounce her 'fonder than she need be of meddlin' and makin' wid other people's affairs.'

'But all the while, Biddy,' said to her one day her sister-in-law, Eliza McFadden—in Bunowen the inhabitants are as a rule more or less connected by birth or marriage—'all the while I dunno why you should have any great call to be settin' your mind on gettin' Margaret Sheehan for Dan. Sorra a thraneen will her poor father be able to give along wid her, you may depind. Sure her mother was tellin' me herself 'twas as much as they could conthrive to git together a few respectable things for Kitty, the way they wouldn't be ashamed, and she marryin' into a rich family. So if Margaret's to have nothin' except her stuck-up notions, apt she'll be to take and spind every pinny she can lay her hands on, and think it's too little into the bargain. And that's how his earnin's'll go to loss on him, instead of savin' up a thrifle agin the bad times, when he has the luck.

It's an humble girl Dan wants—or would, if he'd any wit.'

''Deed now, Eliza,' the Widdy explained herself, 'stuck-up or no, Margaret's not the grabbin' sort, I'll say that for her. If she's took up wid any vagaries about marryin' grand—she may have or she mayn't—my belief is it wouldn't be money she'd be after. 'Twould be just her pride. And she's a good girl, wid a kind heart in her, and clever too, mind you. Many a shillin' she makes wid that fine crochee she does be doin'. Some ladies in Cashalcreagh buys it off her to send up to Dublin. Dan might do a dale worse, he might so. More be token he's thinkin' of her now, that's sartin. But not any great while ago, he had some sort of a likin' for that Ellen Mooney, and I can't abide a bone in her body, goodness forgive me for sayin' so. And I well know that if Margaret won't have him, off he'll bounce, and wid Ellen Mooney he'll take up. And that same 'ud be a bad day for himself, and maybe a worser for his poor mother, now she's so wakely grown, the crathur. For Ellen hasn't e'er a bit of good-nathur in her at all—a cross-tempered little shrimp she is.'

'She is that,' said Mrs. McFadden. 'Like all the rest of them Pather Mooneys. And bedad, now, isn't a man a quare fool to go marry among cross-tempered people? If he was me, he'd let them alone till the fish comes in to warm themselves at the fire, as the sayin' is. For what's the good of anythin', when it's heart-scalded they'll have you from mornin' till night?'

'Well, there's the raison why I'm not wishful

Margaret would be givin' Dan the sack,' said Widdy Coyle, 'and the raison why I do be warnin' her agin thinkin' bad of marryin' a poor man. Not that I ever make mention of Dan to her, mind you. I 've more wit. That 'ud be the right way to set her agin him for good and all. There 's nothin' so conthrary in their minds as most girls, unless it 's maybe some of the dumb crathurs. If they see you 're wantin' them to fancy a thing, they won't so much as come next or nigh it. I mind last summer we had a little red calf up at me brother's I was thryin' to put on cocoa, because we 'd run short of skim-milk—and och, to behould the antics of her! you might ha' thought it was black pisin I had in the bucket to choke her wid. But the minyit I set it down, and let on I was goin' away and lavin' it—sure her head was in it before I could turn round. So niver a word of Dan do I say before Margaret, good or bad; but I just keep talkin' promiscuous about the foolishness of folks settin' themselves up, and the fine fortins poor people has come into now and agin after all, and this way and that way.'

In this strategy Dan's aunt and advocate persevered, and it must be allowed that her artfully conveyed counsels were listened to with exemplary patience by her cousin Margaret Sheehan. That Margaret was a little tired of hearing about the perpetual spinsterhood of the six haughty Miss O'Reillys is more than probable; but she would go on with her crochet and say, 'Och now, to think of that!' and 'Sure themselves were the great gabies,' at the proper places, quite alertly and affably. Nor did her polite attention flag even if the Widdy pro-

ceeded to add another favourite apologue, which turned upon a wonderful piece of good luck met with by a poor fisher boy, who was 'that ragged-lookin' 'twould ha' took two of him to make a dacint scarecrow.'

It so happened that the Widdy took occasion to recite this very narrative one evening before a rather large audience gathered mainly from the youth of Bunowen. The season was summer, and the weather was fine, so there were 'a good few' of them sitting about on the strip of sward, which lies green betwixt the white-faced cabin-row and the iron-grey shingle, where it makes a pleasant basking place at the close of a warm, dry day. As Widdy Coyle came round the turn of the road, with her long shadow slanting away before her nearly out to sea, and her brown, arabesque-patterned shawl over her head, and her flashing milk-can on her arm, she noticed that the most numerous group included her nephew Dan Molloy and several of the young Sheehans, a circumstance which made her bend her steps to the left, and cross the short grass to join them. Margaret Sheehan had found a comfortable ledge, with a lower one for a footstool, where she could crochet at ease; her younger sisters were perched near her, and Dan Molloy confronted her from an opposite bank. He had placed himself there that he might look across at her conveniently, but was a good deal embarrassed by the beams from the flashing west, upon which Margaret had prudently turned her back. They dazzled his eyes, and burnished his coppery red beard, and obliged him to twist his face into a network of wrinkles whenever he wanted to catch a

sight of anything. Other young people lounged in the shallow little recess round which the swarded ledges ran amphitheatre wise. It is a place where many of Bunowen's small dramas have been acted. The mistily blue sea was near enough to be heard creeping among the pebbles, and the hills beyond it were far enough off to be coloured softly like flowers—this evening they wore all the dim mauve of Marie Louise violets.

The Widdy Coyle sat down by Margaret's left hand, unceremoniously extruding Lizzie Sheehan, who thereupon slipped round to her sister's other side with a silent grimace. 'Well, now,' said the Widdy, 'if *I* was wearin' that light buff calico, I 'd be afraid of me life to sit on the ground in it, gettin' it soiled—'twill show every atom of dirt. And once it 's washed, it 's desthroyed. Ne'er a tint of the colour will it keep; buff never does.'

'The grass,' Margaret said, 'is as dry as the thread on a spool, and a dale claner than anythin' indoors, that 's all blackened wid the ugly smoke.'

'It 's aisy talkin' agin the smoke, but I dunno what we 'd do widout it. Them that 's over-partic'lar,' the Widdy said, betrayed into some inconsistency by her chronic disposition to exhort, 'may be apt to have to sit in worse places before they 're a great dale oulder. Them that sets themselves up thinkin' they 're goin' to git richer, it 's poorer they may be after all, for aught they can tell. And sometimes it 's the other way round. . . . Och, Dan, is it there you are? Good evenin' to you, me lad. I thought you 'd be out wid the Hegartys, but to be sure the tide 's not very handy for you to-night.

Ye'll be makin' an early start to-morra. And bedad, now, if you got the same luck wid your fishin' that Thady Phelan had, it 's blessin' yourself you might be, and takin' a holiday. Wasn't I ever tellin' you what happened Thady Phelan? Belike not.'

The story of Thady Phelan was in fact by this time familiar to all the company, but they submitted to it without a protest. Their mood was placidly passive, and they felt that they could listen or not listen just as they pleased, either to the murmur of the waves or the discourse of the old woman. So she began to set forth with much emphasis how Thady, who was a poor little gossoon of a fisher-boy, 'widout a shoe to put his fut in on dry land,' had gone out in his boat one morning after the mackerel in Lanagawn Bay, and how that evening late, the other lads, who had got back before him, saw him coming along in his old boat, without a sign of anything taken, and all settled to jeer at him about his big haul. And how, upon landing, he showed them a small, black-looking box, which he had pulled up in his net, and which was presently discovered to contain some of the finest jewels any one ever laid eyes on, worth mints of money, so that Thady's fortune was made, and never another stroke of work need he put his hand to until his life's end. It was at this point in her narrative that the Widdy introduced the comparison already mentioned: 'There was grandeur and good luck for poor Thady now; and he that ragged lookin' 'twould ha' took a couple of him to make a dacint scarecrow.'

Here, across the old woman's hoarser and lower-pitched tones, a youthful voice struck clear and shrill. 'Isn't it a rael pity, then,' it said, 'that Pat Kearns there can't conthrive to be gettin' the likes of such a big haul? For I 'm sure half a dozen of *him* wouldn't be any too many to dress up a scare-crow wid, if it was to look anyways respectable.'

The speaker was a girl of the name of Rosanne Mooney, a cousin of the cross-tempered Ellen, and though less reprehensible, still, in the Widdy's opinion, over-fond of 'takin' up other people's words.' Her sarcasm was aimed at a black-headed, brown-visaged youth, who lay with two or three others on the sunny sod close by; and it reached its mark. Certainly Pat Kearns's garments were in unusually bad repair. A large hole was frayed right through the elbow of his blue woollen jersey, and the patch that had concealed another rent at his knee now flapped indiscreetly to the passing breezes. These conspicuous defects were due less to poverty, though the Kearns family was one of the poorest, than to the fact that Pat had nowadays nobody at home to be putting in a stitch for him. His mother had 'died on him not so long ago,' not so long, at any rate, but that he remembered how she used to darn and mend. Perhaps Rosanne's jibe reminded him roughly of his loss; or perhaps he especially disliked having his rags just then held up to ridicule; or perhaps, after all, it was only Margaret Sheehan's imagination that made her fancy he looked suddenly crestfallen and forlorn. Be this as it may, it is certain that when her younger sister Lizzie joined in the ensuing laugh, and then chimed in with a

pert reference to Pat's 'ould show of a torn cap,' Margaret nudged her reprovingly, and even went so far as to whisper: 'Whist, you gaby. If you don't behave yourself, I 'll bid mother be callin' you in.' Now, it is possible that the Widdy and her protégé, had they noticed this bit of by-play, might have drawn evil auguries therefrom ; but neither of them did. The Widdy felt that she had improved the occasion satisfactorily, and merely appended a disclaimer of meaning to 'pass remarks or raise a laugh on anybody,' while Dan Molloy found an opportunity to express, in Margaret's hearing, his opinion that 'crochee was the purtiest sort of work a girl could be doin' ; a dale tastier than knittin'.' Which was so far, so good, for the Mooneys were all great knitters. And soon after this the group dispersed, early hours being fashionable at Bunowen.

It had drawn towards sunset of the following day, when Pat Kearns came rowing in along Bunowen strand. He looked as ragged as ever, and even more downcast, for his luck had been bad, and his prospects in life appeared to him very gloomy. Pondering abstractedly upon these he was, as he leisurely rowed homeward, till a voice hailing him near at hand startled him out of his meditations. It was a young voice, too, but softer than Rosanne's.

'Pat Kearns,' it called, 'might you happen to have e'er a sate you could loan me aboard your boat?'

And who should it be but Margaret Sheehan, standing in her buff gown, which the golden sunglow bleached white, on the very point of the sandy spit he was just passing by?

'Why, to be sure, and in coorse I have, Margaret Sheehan, or if I hadn't, I wouldn't be long makin' you one,' Pat replied, backing water energetically to bring his black canvas bows sliding in on the sand at Margaret's feet. But then a vague apprehension of something too good to be true crossed his mind, coupled with the remembrance of last night's scoff which had left him a little suspicious of possible scorning, and he added: 'But what at all would you be doin' in the dirty old boat? She's all fish-scales.'

'And is it stayin' here you'd have me, to be drownded in the tide, if she was twyste as dirty?' Margaret inquired. 'Don't you see that the say's all abroad behind me?'

This statement, though an obvious exaggeration, was not quite unfounded, since a narrow blue streak had really flowed in so as to cut off the sandy spit from the mainland. It is true that Margaret could almost have jumped over the tiny straits, and might have waded across through the shallow water with perfect ease. However, it was, like Mercutio's wound, of depth and width sufficient to serve a purpose.

'It's not havin' anythin' hurtin' a hair of your head I'd be, let alone drowndin', Margaret astore,' Pat answered; and he hastened to upholster the stern bench for her accommodation with a coil of dry net.

'So you'd took next to nothin' to-day?' Margaret said, as they glided along slowly, for Pat was in no hurry to reach the little pier. 'Well, now you've picked up me, and if I was me own weight in macker'l, or sole, or turbot, or anythin' good for aught, you couldn't say you hadn't got a pretty

middlin' big haul. 'Deed, then, it's a pity you haven't; nor a chance of the grand jewel box ould Biddy Coyle was tellin' about.'

'Bedad, if I could only be keepin' *you*,' said Pat, 'I'd think 'twas the grandest haul any man ever took, jewels or no. But sure it's landin' you here I'll have to be directly.'

'And sure landin' isn't lavin', when two people's goin' ashore at the one place,' Margaret observed, with the air of a person who throws out casually some most general remark. But the promptitude with which Pat caught it up and twisted it into a strictly personal application did credit to his presence of mind.

'Then would you ever think at all, macree, of takin' me to keep?' he said, resting abruptly on his oars, while their blades dripped chains of diamonds in the sun. 'Glory be to goodness—sure I was always afraid of me life you'd niver look at me. For why would you? And frettin' I am this long while, for I well know me best chance in this world is to be goin' out to where me brother Johnny is in the States, that's doin' finely; only I hadn't the heart to be settin' off me lone, and quittin'—them I might niver lay eyes on agin, whether they minded me or not. But och, Margaret jewel, if yourself'll not think too bad of comin' along wid me, 'twill be all grandeur entirely. Sorra another wish I have in the world—and you wouldn't disappoint me of it?'

'The States,' said Margaret, 'is a wonderful far way off. A body'd have to be considerin' a great while about crossin' over the say.' An answer which was so much more decisive than Pat had dared to

hope for, that he resumed his rowing in an unspeakable elation of spirits. 'Troth and it's the proud man I am this day, mavourneen,' he said.

Margaret and he seemed, indeed, to have exchanged moods all at once. For his downcast expression had vanished, and with clear and confident looks he had lifted up his head in its torn cap; whereas she, whose habit had been to hold hers rather high, now fixed her eyes on the shallows their keel was cleaving through, as if she were busily engaged in reckoning the dancing flecks of transparent shadow and light with which the ripples paved the sanded bottom. This may have been partly because about the landing-place had gathered a group of lookers-on—'and bad manners to them,' she said to herself, half vexed—amongst whom, as she was fully aware, her arrival in Pat Kearns's boat would create no small sensation. In fact, an officially printed announcement that a marriage had been arranged, and would shortly take place, could scarcely have made the situation plainer to Bunowen. Before the sun had well finished setting, it was known from one end of the hamlet to the other that 'Margaret Sheehan and Pat Kearns were spakin'.'

The news displeased nobody except Dan Molloy and his aunt, the Widdy Coyle, the latter the more seriously of the two, inasmuch as he was likely to find consolation in what she deprecated as a domestic calamity. Besides that, she had taken a far more active part than he in the match-making, and was correspondingly mortified by the failure of her efforts.

'I wisht to goodness, Nannie, I 'd known what was

in the minds of them two—the slieveens,' she said, discussing the subject this time with her crony Mrs. Durkin. 'But sorra a notion had I of any such a thing. Sure who 'd ha' supposed a girl like Margaret 'ud go for to take up wid that raggety young rapscallion? If you 'd axed me, I 'd ha' said he hadn't the impidence in him to be so much as thinkin' of her, no more than if she was the Queen of Connaught.'

'For the matter of that,' said Mrs. Durkin, 'I could have tould you he was thinkin' of her fast enough. It 's my belief she niver put a stitch in her crochee-strip that Pat didn't see, if he was anywhere's widin sight of her.'

'And I as good as advisin' Margaret,' the Widdy went on lamenting, 'to be takin' the poorest man that axed her, and *I* manin' me nephew Dan, and *she* manin' Pat Kearns——. Bad cess to them, makin' a fool of me. Many a time I might better ha' whist about the Miss O'Reillys and Thady Phelan.'

'According to my experience,' said Mrs. Durkin, 'it 's little differ one way or the other, good or bad, that advice makes, when the talk is of likin' or lovin'. You might be the whole day biddin' me to like thim boiled scallops off the rocks, and ne'er a bit would I touch, for I can't abide the thoughts and smell of them. But I might spare meself the throuble of tellin' you they was ugly things, if be chance you have a fancy for them.'

'They 're a nasty brash,' the Widdy said with inconsequence. 'But all the same,' she persisted regretfully, 'all the same, if I 'd known, I 'd ha' held me fool's tongue about Thady Phelan and his big haul.'

AN OULD TORMENT

THE long car which runs on Tuesdays and Fridays from Barlesky to Glenmoran seldom goes fast, and is generally at its very slowest about half-way up the tedious ascent beginning where the plantations of Castlereval over-arch the road, but emerging upon a barely bleak plateau, with a sea view ahead, partly intercepted by the nearer roofs of Ardowney village. In soft weather—when the roads 'do be cruel heavy goin',' our drivers say, apologetically—the hill is climbed at such a leisurely pace that there would be time to relate fully and discuss between the foot and the top the most involved piece of gossip, and the opportunity is not often let slip. It was not so on the rather dreary autumn afternoon which found Miss Debby Rourke that far on her long day's journey from Kilclashan, a little place 'the dear knows how many mile up beyond Barlesky,' to Drumbeg, 'a good step on the other side of Glenmoran,' as Mrs. Fahy, who at this stage had become her neighbouring fellow-passenger, took occasion to explain. 'And the tiresome thramp it is for a body, after one's bones has been jogglin' the best part of the day on these weary ould conthraptions of cars,' she added, with commiseration, for Miss Debby looked small and decrepit in a coarse

grey shawl of the cheapest quality. But 'No doubt me niece's conveyance will meet me in the town—Mrs. Kinsella, that is, of Shinogue Farm,' Miss Debby said, with such an intolerably lofty air that the current of Mrs. Fahy's sympathy was turned all awry, and she replied, 'Ay, sure, the poor woman might happen to be sendin' th' ould garron in to be fetchin' some thrifle she might want, now that she 's through with thrashin' her little bit of oats.'

But Miss Debby's satisfaction on this day was proof against any trivial nips and pricks. The main root of it was that she felt herself to be so successfully carrying out a long-cherished design. Her journey southward from the remotest corner of the county Donegal had been the object of several years' planning and saving up, during which her actual enjoyments had been scanty in the extreme ; and now, unlike many much-premeditated pleasures, this expedition promised to take place among peculiarly happy circumstances. Its immediate occasion was highly auspicious. Mrs. Kinsella, a widowed niece, struggling with an unmanageable holding, had written to announce the engagement of her only daughter to Francis McEnery, a thriving young farmer in the neighbourhood, which, she said, was more than ever Lizzie could have looked for, poor girl! and would be the making of her brothers, poor boys! Francis owned a good little bit of land, and had no parents nor brethren living, nor any drawback except a father's sister that kept house for him, and was warranted to clear out of it when he brought home his wife. The letter was full of exultation, undisguised save by eccentric spelling. Miss Debby

chose to accept it as an invitation to attend the wedding. Few things, indeed, could have been further from the writer's intentions or wishes; but it fell in exactly with those of the reader, and in such cases the reader has sometimes a terrible power to construe *ad lib.*

It seemed to her a splendid chance. Miss Debby liked society and variety, but had experienced little of either, as early in life she had quitted Drumbeg to rough it along with a needy brother on a lonesome, mountainy farm, and since his death had lived even poorlier as lodge-keeper of a derelict demesne on five shillings a week, eked out by knitting and poultry. No doubt it may be considered unfortunate that on the few occasions when she had met with her relatives at Shinogue Farm she had impressed them unfavourably as a prying sort of person, prone to make and publish ungratifying notes. For unkindly observation is sometimes resented almost as deeply by one's neighbours as inoffensive indifference. Nevertheless, Miss Debby was now fully determined to pay a long-threatened visit, and she made arrangements for an absence which she hoped might extend up to Christmas, if not beyond it. She expected to put in at least a month with her niece, Nannie Kinsella, and she had sundry old acquaintanceships in the district, which she counted upon as likely to be value for a certain amount of board and lodging. Sentiment and a strictly commercial spirit mixed themselves queerly in her forecasts of her prospects. Early in November was the date mentioned for the wedding by Mrs. Kinsella, and October had not yet run out. But Miss Debby quoted to herself: *It is*

better to hinder folk at the setting on than help them with the readying up; a proverb intended as a warning against belated arrival at a feast; and she had resolved to allow herself an ample margin. As a further precaution, she had been careful not to post the announcement of her coming until there was no time left for her niece to write and put her off, even if so disposed. 'They'll be bound to take me in, like it or lump it,' she reflected with triumph whenever she recalled this bit of strategy.

Therefore she was not in the least abashed by Mrs. Fahy's studiously disparaging tone, and replied with unabated self-importance: 'Ay, bedad, it's themselves 'll be bound to have plinty of sendin' and fetchin' these times, wid the weddin' comin' on.'

But Miss Debby's pride had indeed reached its destined falling place; and another shove from her travelling companion brought it heavily down:

''Deed now, it's to be pitied are they, the poor people!' Mrs. Fahy said, not uncomplacently. 'Greatly knocked about they must be wid young McEnery takin' and breakin' off the match.'

'What talk have you, woman?' Miss Debby said, with a jump which so nearly toppled her off the car that she had to recover her balance by a strangling clutch at Mrs. Fahy's shawl. 'Sure it's only a fortnight last Thursday since I got the letter from me niece, tellin' me all the news of how it was settled at Michaelmas. If you've heard anythin' diff'rent, somebody's after makin' a fool of you.'

Her obvious perturbation, mocking her professed incredulity, was exceedingly agreeable to Mrs. Fahy, who replied, with a calm assumption of the facts

more convincing than any argument: 'In coorse it's been a terrible upset to them. And it's not as if there was a word agin poor Lizzie. Everybody's sayin' they ought to have the law of him. But sure two lone women like her and her mother has no chance of doin' anythin' widout e'er a man to look after the lawyers. It's losin' money they'd be. If her brother Patrick was a couple of year or so oulder, he'd have a right to be cloutin' McEnery over the head, but he's only a spalpeen yet. Bedad, now, I think we're all talkin' about it these last three weeks, or very near, ma'am, letter or no.'

So at Glenmoran, where the car stopped, and no conveyance met her, Miss Debby started on her long walk to Drumbeg in a disconcerted mood. She had slightly relieved her feelings by remarking to Mrs. Fahy, when assisting her to alight with a flop: 'An ould body that's gettin' as mighty clumsy as you are, ma'am, has no business to be thravellin' on these awkward ould cars. You might as aisy as not twist your ankle round gettin' off, and niver put your fut straight under you agin, the way it happint to a poor woman I knew.' But this gave her only a passing gratification. The effect which this sudden deplorable over-clouding of her grand-niece's future would probably have upon her own reception and entertainment at Shinogue Farm was naturally what chiefly occupied her mind, not, however, entirely to the exclusion of some impersonal interest about the details of the event, and a wish to ascertain the correctness of various theories as touching its cause, which had been put forward during her past half-hour's gossip with stout Mrs. Fahy.

Her hopes of, at any rate, satisfying her curiosity upon reaching the farm might have been smaller if she had known how things were going on there. A dead silence, in fact, prevailed between mother and daughter upon the object which occupied their thoughts, and Mrs. Kinsella would have had to own herself as ignorant almost as the speculating neighbours about the ins and outs of the matter. From the first onset of the trouble, Lizzie had been unapproachably incommunicative; and a brief statement that she would have nothing more to say to Francis McEnery was the only account she gave of the abrupt change of plans which had all at once transformed her glowing vivacity into a dumb and gloomy study in black and white. One day Mrs. Kinsella, after long, wistful watching, ventured to say, but dared not address the remark to anybody in particular:

'It 's better off many a girl is at home than she would be in e'er a place else, when all 's said and done. And, anyway, the dear knows her mother 's better off to get the chance to be keepin' her awhile, and the longer the better,—instead of to be lonesome and fretted wid missin' the pleasant face of her about the house.'

From Lizzie, who, truth to say, was at that moment dismally scowling, this declaration elicited no response, unless we should count as such the fact that in the course of the same afternoon she spontaneously remarked upon the fineness of the young pig Mrs. Kinsella was rearing, and said he looked real beautiful. If she did, in truth, think him so, he was the one agreeable object she beheld in a world all grown waste and ugly, ever since that morning a long fort-

night ago when a certain letter had arrived, to which she had replied by hurriedly making up a parcel of small miscellaneous articles, and running down to post it herself at Killoughal post-office near the cross-roads. It was of trifling bulk, and weighed only fourpence-worth of stamps, yet the absence of its contents left a terrible gap in her life, and had somehow given whatever she met with an ill-favoured aspect. Consequently, it seemed only 'all of the piece with the rest' when another letter came bearing the singularly unwelcome news that they must expect to see aunt Debby Rourke before night. Lizzie, indeed, had received the tidings of this fresh calamity in total silence. Mrs. Kinsella, stricken with remorse at having incurred it by a superfluous bit of vainglory and a subsequent faint-hearted suppression of the mortifying latest intelligence, offered, though not without evident twinges of scruple, to 'go meet th' ould torment at Glenmoran, and tell her they couldn't conthrive to put her up by any manner of manes.' But Lizzie had said, 'Och, no, let it alone; sure it 's all one,' and continued to fling her few small possessions disregardfully out of her bedroom into a tiny closet adjoining, as a preliminary to the preparation of the chamber for this self-invited guest.

So brief was the notice she had given that before these hurried operations were well accomplished, the sons of the house, who had been acting as scouts, tumbled over one another in their haste to report: 'She's comin' along up the lane.' And two or three minutes afterwards Mrs. Kinsella said despondently from a front window: 'Sure enough, there's herself stumpin' in at the gate, and the dear knows, I don't, when we'll be apt to see her stumpin' out agin.

Mercy on us all! But it's the quare show she does be makin' of herself, wid her shawl over her head, as if she belonged to nobody respectable in the world . . . and a bit of an ould sack like in her hand, as if she was some tinker's wife out pickin' up other people pitaties and chuckens. It's meself was the fool to put pen in ink to be writin' to her. I might ha' known 'twas as good as stirrin' up a wasp's nest wid a bit of stick.' So she descended repiningly to express her joy and felicity.

With a characteristic fine tact Miss Debby replied: 'Well now, Nannie, I only heard tell of your upset, as I came along on me way here; the people was all talkin' about it. But sure, sez I, why should everybody be disappointed because the young man's took and went off his bargain wid your daughter—no fault of hers, very belike. And I thought I'd a right to be keepin' me word wid yous, weddin' or no. I'm bringin' her a pair of lovely brown woollen stockin's in a present, that she can be wearin' as well single as married, if she never gets another chance itself.'

As she seemed disposed to enlarge upon this theme, Mrs. Kinsella desperately despatched Lizzie upstairs, by way of seeing to the lighting of a fire, while she herself conducted Miss Debby into the kitchen for a cup of tea, and seized the opportunity to insist that there must be no allusions to Francis McEnery. Lizzie, she said, had never uttered a word about him ever since the day a letter had come from him—nobody except herself had seen it—and she had just bundled up every little present that ever he gave her in a parcel, and sent it away by the post. It was most mysterious. But the girl couldn't be

annoyed about the matter; and, with Mrs Kinsella's good-will, the young villain's name should never be mentioned in that house. Otherwise, of course, her aunt Debby would be welcome to stop the week's end out, 'and she after comin' that far for as good as nothin' at all.'

'The week's end, bedad!' Miss Debby commented in her mind, with much dissatisfaction at such a limit to her stay. But for the present she judged it discreet only to say: 'Sure, then, how 'll you hinder her of hearin' the neighbours clackin' about him? Let alone her bein' apt to be meetin' himself continyal, goin' to chapel and market, and all manner? 'Twill be awkward enough.'

'Och, for the matter of that,' said Mrs. Kinsella, 'we might be worse off, for, as it so happens, because of we ever goin' Killoughal ways, which is north, and the McEnerys Duncorry ways, which is south, we do be walkin' out of the other's road every step we set, and so they're not like to lay eyes on one another in half a dozen months of Sundays, unless it was by oncommon bad luck. But here 's Lizzie herself comin' down again. Aunt Debby—we 'd betther whist.'

Miss Debby's curiosity was scarcely more than whetted when she found herself left alone for the night in her little room. There were dozens of questions about the quarrel which she earnestly desired to ask; but she felt that her niece's injunctions could not, under the circumstances, safely be disregarded. So she sought some solace in spying round and about the apartment. It did not at first sight promise to produce anything of great interest;

but Miss Debby's inquisitiveness was as deft as an ant-eater's tongue at thrusting itself into improbable crannies, and her researches were at length repaid by a find. Out of a crack at one corner of the old dressing-table she poked a small bit of crumpled paper, which seemed to have been crushed in somebody's hand, and then stuffed into a crevice out of sight. There was large pen-and-ink writing on it. That this presumably had never been intended for her perusal did not trouble her at all, and hardly even occurred to her, as she smoothed out the sheet with the back of her hair-brush, and began to decipher a letter: 'Moneyhill Farm,' it ran, 'October 7th. My dear Lizzie,—My Aunt Rose was asking me to meet her sister-in-law, Miss Kelly, coming on the eleven o'clock train, and that was the reason of my not getting out to you on last Sunday; and every day since that I have had to be showing her the sights of the place, when I could spare the time from the turnips and mangolds, for me aunt's cold is no better yet. And little enough there is to be showing anybody in a little old dog-hole of a place, which is what I call this. But you have no call to be so cross over it, for I might slip over the fields for an hour next Sunday, or maybe on Sunday week. And if I knew you was on the road with your mother, and we passing on the car, I would stop right enough, but they never told me till we wor round the turn. But I mean to let you know that if any person was passing the remark that Miss Kelly was wearing a gold-jewelled brooch, the same as the one I am after giving to yourself, that hers is twice as little as yours. And, according

to my reckoning, it is not three weeks all out since I was at your place with the silk coachineel scarf, that cost the double of the brooch. So no more at present from yours truly, Francis McEnery.'

'And with that she must needs take and flounce off to send him back his brooches and all, just because he happint to write in a bit of an ugly temper. The same as herself done very belike,' Miss Debby moralised, as she finished her spelling out. 'And when that ould Aunt Rose of his is as sure as anythin' wishful all the while to be makin' up the match for the sister-in-law—Miss Kelly, bedad! Och, the young gaby—Lizzie! She's as good as made him a prisint to the two of them now. And no more sign of a weddin' than if I was after landin' on a black rock in the middle of the wild says; and I dunno what excuse I have, if themselves here make up e'er a raison agin my stoppin' in it.'

On the verge of sleep Miss Debby's last coherent thought clung to a vague sense that the bringing on again of the match would surely be to her own, if nobody else's advantage, and next morning she woke up to a clearer and stronger perception of this truth. She considered it, one must admit, very exclusively from her own point of view. To the many inconvenient and mortifying circumstances that would attend her premature return to Kilclashan, without any grand doings to brag about, she was keenly alive, while the changed fortunes of the persons most concerned scarcely roused her sympathy at all. Perhaps the best-defined of her sentiments, other than purely self-regarding, was a wish

for the frustration of the designs on behalf of 'the sister-in-law, Miss Kelly,' which she had promptly assumed in Francis McEnery's Aunt Rose. However, the result of her meditations was, that she appeared at breakfast with a secret plan ready made, which impelled her to announce her purpose of going towards Glenmoran after the meal, in quest of a cousin of hers, one Patrick McAnliffe, whose family she had known in her younger days. Seeing that so many 'ould ages' had elapsed since then, and that Patrick McAnliffes were perplexingly plentiful all over the countryside, Miss Debby's chances of lighting upon this particular kinsman seemed rather remote. Mrs. Kinsella and Lizzie remarked, on hearing of her project, 'that liker than not there was no talk about any such ould crathur bein' in it these times, for if he was one of the McAnliffes of Rochestown he must be the age of seven people by now.' But they did not discourage her from the enterprise by any manner of means. On the contrary, they promoted it, by arranging for her to travel the greater part of the way in a cart which was taking a calf to market, and as the vehicle bumped out of the yard, they said and assented with congratulatory grumbling that they'd be well shut of her for the rest of the morning, at all events—the ould torment!

Now, all the while, Miss Debby had no real intention of prosecuting researches among the Patrick McAnliffes of her youth, and to what was the true object of her little jaunt she attained without much trouble, though she found it expedient, when making inquiries, to take a few precautions,

lest she should endanger the incognito which she chose to preserve. Accordingly, in the course of that mild moth-grey October forenoon, young Francis McEnery, busy with the pulling of his ruddy, crisp-leaved mangel-wurzels, was interrupted, embarrassed, and bewildered by the appearance to him of a little, old, very poor-looking woman, who claimed a most intimate friendship with his deceased parents and grandparents, and who proceeded to trace with himself a cousinship so intricate that at the end of twice up and down the cow-lane he only understood something dimly about a marriage between Ody Heffernan, that was one of the Ballyfottrel Caseys, and as big a rogue as ever saw crooked, and Biddy Doherty, that was a one of the red-headed daughters of Matty Byrne of Chapelmacottal, and sister's child to Peter Riordan, the same that had a right to have owned the townland of Rathgormley, if his wife got fairity from them she ought in her stepmother's faction.

This unlooked-for family connection, whose talk was as voluble as it was puzzling, chanced to descend upon Francis in an unusually defenceless plight, because his housekeeping aunt had accompanied her sister-in-law, Miss Kelly, home to Derry, for a little change of air after her bad cold; so that he had no ally indoors to back him up in the repulse of a persistent invader. His gawky unreadiness left him an easy prey to Miss Debby's encroaching approaches. She got without difficulty into the kitchen, where she established herself by the hearth, and made it plain that she would not depart thence until she had been refreshed with

tea; and while the kettle was boiling she pursued her investigations into his domestic affairs with considerable success, picking up two or three bits of information that she regarded as valuable. One of these, for instance, related to Miss Kelly, and might have been thought by a superficial observer of but little seeming substance. But Miss Debby deemed it worth while to make a mental note of the fact that Francis McEnery would have been glad to clear away the big bunch of quiver-grass Maggie Kelly was after sticking in the corner of the dresser —an ugly, littery thing, he hated the sight of it!— only he was afraid she'd be mad if she found he'd moved it, supposing she came back again, he couldn't tell would she or no, but he misdoubted his Aunt Rose had a notion of bringing her along.

'The man's a *noony-nawny*, and 'll be just as bad or good as whoever gets him,' Miss Debby said to herself; and then she became more boldly personal than ever, and, as she sweetened her hot tea, she said to him point-blank, 'And so yourself and Lizzie Kinsella's apt to not be makin' a match of it after all?'

Her host at this home-thrust could only glow in a deeper confusion, and stammer out self-betrayals. 'What's a chap to do when a girl takes and slings every iotum he's ever gave her, back in his face in a parcel in the post, like as if they was so much ould cabbage-leaves? And has him openin' it at the breakfast-table, unbeknown, to set people passin' remarks, and risin' a laugh on him. But there's as good as she that 'ud ha' thought

them worth keepin', and sayin' thank'ee for, civil—and better than she, after that again; unless anybody 's of the opinion that a saller skin and a big head of black hair 's the only thing fit to be lookin' at.' Francis was so evidently quoting, that Miss Debby knew Miss Kelly, the sister-in-law, must be a blonde.

'Well, but Lizzie Kinsella 's a fine slip of a girl, mind you,' she said. 'You might look for her aquals for a long while among them that 's gingery coloured, or yellery, and cross-tempered. You see, she was pointed out to me one day, and I goin' the road wid the people I 'm stoppin' at, that was how I seen her,' Miss Debby added, artfully. 'They do say she 'll marry Thady Fanning now. I dunno, but anyway he 's after her.'

'That 's how she served me prisints—the way I was tellin' you—every single one of them,' Francis said, in a tone of rueful resentment.

'And every single one of them 'ud I serve straight back to her agin, if I was in your coat, ay, would I, bedad,' Miss Debby said, her eyes following his to where the edges of a brown paper parcel protruded from behind a hung-up tin dish cover.

'Maggie Kelly 's got the cornelian pin out of it now,' he said, despondingly. 'Nothing 'ud suit me aunt but I must let her have it: she as good as made me give it.'

'Sure you might very aisy be gettin' Lizzie a somethin' else in place of it,' said Miss Debby, 'any day you was in town at market. You 'll be dhrivin' the bit of a sorrel mare I seen in the field

there, under the ould yoke of a side car you have in the shed, plenty of times in the week, I 'll bet you twopence.'

'Of an odd while I do,' said Francis.

'Are you apt to be dhrivin' by Killoughal cross-roads any time to-morra or next day?' Miss Debby inquired.

'Sure, I 've got to be passin' there about noon to-morra, bringin' his reverence at Rathbrian a barrel of bruised oats I was after promisin' him.'

'Bedad, then, that 's as handy as if it was bespoke,' said Miss Debby with glee, 'for you can be lendin' me a lift a long step down them lanes. It 's wishful I am to go see me Uncle Willie's married son's nephew and his childer. I was tellin' you about them—och yis, you remimber. So I 'll be ready there waitin' for you before twelve, right enough.'

'The *somethin'* you will, y'ould torment!' Francis said to himself. Still, she was showing symptoms of immediate departure, and, in his eagerness to hail these, he agreed to her arrangement about the car with an apparent alacrity, all the while inwardly deploring the fact that the shortest round by which he could avoid the cross-roads would take him better than three miles out of his way—a detour too wide even for the circumvention of so annoying an ambush.

At breakfast next morning Miss Debby again had a programme to announce. This was Thursday, so, as she knew full well that she would be expected to take the returning long-car home on the Saturday, it behoved her to use despatch, if her actions should have any influence upon the

posture of affairs. Her cousin, one of those McAnliffes, she said — relying upon an ancient intermarriage between the families for justification in thus misleadingly describing Lizzie's recalcitrant bachelor — had promised to meet her that morning at the cross-roads, not far from Shinogue Farm, and bring her with him on his yoke, the way she could get to go see Katty Dermody, that was married to ould Nicholas Keogh livin' out beyond Cloughduffy. And again Mrs. Kinsella and Lizzie entirely approved of her intentions. But would Lizzie, Miss Debby wondered, think bad of showing her the short cut to the cross-roads, over the fields, so that she needn't be killin' herself thrampin' further than there was any occasion? Miss Debby put forward this speculation in a casual, promiscuous sort of way, and yet the point was a cardinal one—the very pivot upon which her whole plot turned. And at first a ruinous hitch seemed to threaten, for Mrs. Kinsella said sure Jimmy and Bobby could run along with their aunt. There was no school that morning, and it would be a charity to keep them out of mischief; and the two boys, perhaps seeing different possibilities, expressed a most inconvenient willingness to oblige. Miss Debby had to protest vehemently against an escort which would lead to the ould legs being raced off of her by a pair of young miscreants, and even so she might hardly have carried her point if she had not contrived to drop into Mrs. Kinsella's ear, the opinion of a certain renowned Dr. O'Dwyer to the effect that walks abroad in the fresh air were the only certain means

of preventing a girl who had had a disappointment the way Lizzie had from being a great deal more likely than not to go into a decline.

Carry it she did, however, and when she set out not long before noon, her grand-niece Lizzie was her companion through the pleasant autumn fields. They were a silent couple, slipping their skimpy shadows along past the briar-bushes, bright with berries and dew-drops and frost-painted leaves. Both looked with pre-occupied eyes. Lizzie was thinking how, not many days ago, the shine and shadow had been weaving itself into a marvellous vista, at the end of which gleamed her wedding morning; whereas now lay before her but the commonplace dreariness of a joyless winter. Miss Debby, on her part, was forecasting all the vexations that would attend her own untimely return to the lonely, dilapidated gate-lodge away at Kilclashan. 'Biddy 'll be ragin' mad when she behoulds me,' she said to herself. 'And she consaitin' I was quit for a couple of months. Leppin' she 'll be.'—Biddy was her *locum tenens*.—'Faix now, if the match be good luck was on agin, I 'd make it me business to stop over the weddin', one way or the other, I would so. It 's no better than robbin' me of me car-fare.'

But by this time they had reached a stile leading into a narrow, hedge-muffled cart-track, across the further end of which glimpsed the highroad. And here Lizzie spoke. 'Well now, Aunt Debby,' she said, 'you can't be missin' your way. There 's the road before you, and a couple of perch to the right 'll bring you to the cross. So I 'll run back to me mother, that 's about churnin'. I think I hear wheels.'

Sure enough, they sounded unseen, driving behind the hedgerows. Everything would be destroyed at the most critical moment by Lizzie's turning back.

'Och no, jewel, don't lave me for your life,' said Miss Debby. 'I want you to help me over this and up on the car.'

'To be sure I 'll give you a heft over,' said Lizzie: 'but it 's the quare bosthoon your cousin 'ud be if he couldn't lend you a hand up on his car.' She raised Miss Debby, as she spoke, under the elbows with a vigorous shove; but the old woman dropped back again with an ungainly stumble, and then sat down with screeches on the steps of the stile. 'Och murdher?' she said, 'I 'm desthroyed! I 'm after wranchin' me unfortunate ankle. I couldn't put me fut under me for the worth of everythin' in Ireland. What at all 'll I do? Och, Lizzie, girl dear, you must—I dunno what else you can do but just skyte down now straight to the car, and bid himself—me cousin—step up and fetch me. Make haste, for the sake of goodness; don't let him be passin' out of call.'

Thus did it come about that Lizzie Kinsella sped in headlong haste out of Neil's Lane, and was barely in time to catch up with Francis McEnery's car, as the sorrel mare jogged out of sight round the corner, driven by some one who thought fit to be very hard of hearing. But, 'The saints look up and down on the whole of us!' he said, jumping off with a wide-sweeping curve, when at last he had turned his head and recognised the person calling after him.

'Is it yourself, Lizzie Kinsella? And what at all 's took you then these times whatever?'

Lizzie was so long in explaining, that sorrel Sally enjoyed a most satisfactory browse up and down the deep grass-border, undisturbed save by an occasional twitch of the bridle in her master's absent-minded hand. In fact, explanations were still in progress when the two young people became aware of a third person shuffling towards them out of the lane, which caused Francis McEnery to observe, 'Och, botheration to it! whatever 's bringin' the ould woman about? Bad luck to it! I 'd forgotten her, cliver and clane.'

To which Lizzie replied, 'Bedad now, and so had I. And she lettin' on she couldn't stir a step wid a wranch she 'd gave her ankle. Little enough ails her, anyway, to keep her of comin' botherin' where she isn't wanted.'

The fact was that Miss Debby had been incited by curiosity, and a fear of ferrets, which always beset her when among hedges and ditches, to take an observation of this long-protracted interview. She had hoped to do so unseen, but perceiving herself to be detected, she began to approach with an ostentatious hobble and loud groans.

'Never mind, Francey,' ungrateful Lizzie said in a diminishing whisper. 'She 'll be quittin' out of it, body an bones, to-morra or next day, I hope to goodness; and then, when you slip over, we might get a couple of minyits' talk and no fear of her comin' meddlin' and makin' wid us—the ould torment!'

TWO SACKS OF POTATOES

KILMACLONES is at least ten long Irish miles from the sea, which sends but few messengers so far inland. Only in rough weather do the white gulls visit our fields, settling like foam-flecks on the dark clods, or swooping about among the shag-footed, tramping plough-horses. Most of our small farming-folk, however, at one time or another have spent a week or so at Roslavin, the nearest seaside village. Some of them, indeed, do this regularly every year, but the expense is too heavy to be incurred with such frequency by many people. We call it 'stoppin' at the salt wather,' and esteem it a grand remedy for 'wakeliness,' from whatever cause arising.

The most fashionable time for going is late summer, in the interval between the digging of potatoes and the reaping of oats, a season convenient partly because it affords a leisurely pause in the occupations on a body's little farm, and partly from commissariat considerations. For, as a rule, a sack of potatoes, freshly lifted, accompanies the visitor to Roslavin, and not only furnishes the main item in his bill of fare, but fixes the length of his sojourn. When the sack lies limp and flat, he ties up his handkerchief bundle and goes home.

Roslavin itself, apart from its ocean frontage, where the great waves swing in and out, is merely a commonplace row of neat, small houses, all of them whitewashed, and many of them showing an envelope stuck in a window, which signifies that lodgings may be had behind it—not, however, by the people who come with potato-sacks. These partial and unprofitable boarders resort to the extreme north end of the village, where, on the verge of the grey shingle-bank, it dwindles into a sprinkling of tiny cabins. Here the frugal stranger will be admitted, provisions and all, since his hosts cannot afford to despise what few weekly pence may accrue from his entertainment. And he, for his part, is by no means exacting.

It was toward the end of a fine hot August that the Lackens up at Kilmaclones resolved to send Joe and Thady in turn to the salt water. The Lackens were three, two brothers and a sister, all of them weather-beaten, middle-aged persons, whom their neighbours' children would soon begin to call 'ould.' At present everybody was more or less given to calling them omadhauns and gabies and great gawks, and they were undeniably a strange and irresponsible household.

Just the routine work on their little bit of land the Lackens got through well enough; but they so frequently said and did ridiculous things that a large stock of comic anecdotes had gradually accumulated at their expense, and could be drawn upon handily whenever anybody wanted to 'rise a laugh' without making ill-feeling. For no one could accuse these absurd Lackens, particularly

Joe and Thady, of being huffish, or standing on their dignity. Lizzie might be sometimes 'a trifle stiff,' but her only protest against ridicule was a deprecatory grin.

In fact, the neighbours' expressed opinion ran that 'they would liefer have people making fools of them than not, for there was nothing they liked better.' Still they seemed to prefer some degree of seclusion, and the three lived rather isolated in their little house.

Now, besides the series of old stories about the Lackens, there were always two or three more recent ones in active circulation; and one August everybody was chuckling over Joe's folly about journeying to Roslavin. Both Joe and Thady had suffered in the spring from a bad attack of influenza, to remove the lingering ill effects of which it was arranged that they should for once try the salt-water cure. Each was to go alone, while the other stayed at home with Lizzie to look after things.

Joe's turn was to come first, and Martin McGahan had offered to take him and his sack of potatoes the whole way to Roslavin. But when the cart called at the Lackens' door, Joe was not forthcoming, and not till a long half-hour after it had lumbered away did he appear. The truth was that at the last moment he had found himself unable to confront the prospect of exile among unfamiliar scenes and faces, an experience as dreadful as new.

That seemed perhaps not so 'onraisonable altogether,' in the eyes, at any rate, of Lizzie and Thady. But it was, they said, 'just the worth of Joe' to explain his absence by declaring within

ear-shot of several neighbours that he had been 'lookin' to see was there e'er a tadpole in the green pool at the back of the barn,' and it next door to the first day of September! Tadpoles! Of course it was repeated everywhere, and all the spalpeens in the parish were frog-hopping and croaking after them, and kept asking ludicrous questions. What else could you expect?

This derision, indeed, probably helped Joe to screw up his courage, and actually to set off on Geraghty's side-car a few days later. But as he jolted along his heart was even heavier than his sack, and the care-worn furrows on his face seemed to deepen, like the ruts along the roughening, shingly road.

It was a very bright, cloudless morning, with a chill wind, and when he came in sight of Roslavin, the sea spread a dim olive-green, and the mountains across the bay wore a transparent, wild-violet haze, and the sand-hills were piled up in soft, shadowy gold, and the foam of the breakers was dashed every moment like the light of shaken lilies on the iron-grey shingle, all of it under the purest blue a-dazzle with sunshine.

But all Joe could say to himself was:

'Och, it's the hijjis, disolit-lookin' place! I wish I was out of it!'

Mrs. Dineen, the mistress of the little shaggy-roofed, rough-walled cabin on the beach where he was to lodge, welcomed him without much cordiality, being unfavourably impressed by his awkward manners and ungainly aspect. She pointed out to him a recess between the house door and window in which

he might deposit his potato-sack; and he, having done so with a heavy dump, stood contemplating it despondently. He was recollecting the injunctions he had received to stop at Mrs. Dineen's till his sack was empty, and he was at the same time considering how large and substantial and weighty it looked.

'Musha, but 'twill take a powerful dale of aitin' to get through that!' he said, thinking aloud, which was a bad habit of his. 'There must be a matter of seven or eight stone in it. I 'll be a terrible long while at them wid only meself, unless there was anybody might be takin' an odd few off of me—or maybe rats; rats is great at devourin' all before them. Have you e'er a rat in it, ma'am?' he inquired of Mrs. Dineen.

But she, having overheard and misunderstood, replied with some huffiness: 'Sorra a rat is there, or *anythin' else*, let me tell you, in this house, to be layin' a finger on your pitaties! Yourself's the only one 'll be meddlin' or makin' wid them. So if you're wishful to be boilin' a few now for your supper, you may just sort them out yourself.'

She threw down beside him an old zinc bucket, which evidently had once held whitewash, but was now incapacitated by a large, jagged rent at the rim. Joe began to extract double handfuls of potatoes so lavishly that Mrs. Dineen, looking on, said at last:

'Ah, sure, thim 's plinty. You 've enough there to be plantin' a couple of dhrills, let alone puttin' down for a body's supper. You won't ait the half of thim.'

'I dunno but I might,' Joe said hopefully. 'I 'll be fine and hungry in meself, you may depind, wid the ojus change of air.'

But Mrs. Dineen was right; and, moreover, she thriftily warmed up the large remnant for Joe's breakfast the next morning; he had then no excuse for drawing again upon the contents of the bulky sack. His night's sleep had been troubled by the strangeness of the place, and especially the unfamiliar sound of the waves tumbling close at hand, which gave him a restless sense that some untimely works were being carried on. After breakfast he walked out, feeling forlorn and dazed, over the slippery shingle and along by the line of plunging foam-crests. How was he to get through all the empty hours of that breezy, brilliant day?

He bathed, according to instructions, and it made him feel sticky and chilly; and, also according to instructions, swallowed a large quantity of the strong Atlantic brine, which rasped his throat, and was altogether a beverage neither soothing nor exhilarating.

As the smooth south end of the beach seemed to be frequented by what he described as 'very high-up quality,' he kept aloof among the boulders and shingle-banks, where he saw nobody except a small, dark-headed child in grey woollen rags, who peered bright-eyed at him from behind a rock. And when he beckoned to it out of his lonesomeness, it vanished suddenly into some crevice, and reappeared no more than if it had been a rain-drop shaken off a bough.

At sunset he was seated on a tussock of tawny seaweed watching the huge, fiery orange burn a wonderful hollow for itself amid the dove-coloured haze far on the horizon. Joe had never before beheld the sun sink over the sea, and he very

heartily wished that the next evening he might be watching it go down as usual behind the lopped elms at the end of Murray's lane. But there was no prospect of that; the bulging potato-sack was a desperate fact.

Then he turned himself slowly round until he faced dejectedly inland, where the rugged beach, with its blackened boulders and harsh-hued shingle, and pale, tawny sand-hillocks, was flooded by the last long rays. And as he turned, a daring project flashed into his mind and made his eyes sparkle.

Joe had gone to Roslavin on a Monday, and his friends did not expect him home again for a fortnight; his supply of potatoes ought to hold out so long, at least.

'And maybe you 'll come back lookin' less like an ould coat caught on a branch of wizendy bog-wood,' Lizzie had observed, referring to his grey and gaunt appearance. Yet on the afternoon of only Wednesday, what should she espy from the door where she stood knitting but the lanky form of Joe, red bundle in hand, tramping up the lane!

'The laws bless us, and what's bringin' you at all?' Lizzie began to call, long before he was within hearing, and she continued to do so unanswered until he stood on the threshold.

'Sure, me own pair,' he said then, looking down at his dusty boots.

'And what ailed you at all to not be stoppin' where you were?' said Lizzie. 'Sure to goodness,' she continued, catching sight of a smallish brown roll which Joe carried under one arm, 'you don't

mane to tell me you're after finishin' the big sack of pitaties?'

He had not meant to tell her so, but the leading question tempted him irresistibly, and he said: 'The say air does be puttin' a surprisin' hunger in a body.'

'Surprisin' you may call it,' said Lizzie. 'Saints and patience, but you're the awful man! To think you'd go ait your own weight, one might say, in the inside of a couple of days! And as quare-lookin' a scarecrow at the ind of it as if you hadn't had e'er a bit for a twelvemonth!'

At this the scarecrow looked disconcerted as well as queer, for to judge by Lizzie's tone, she could hardly have been more cross with him if he had given her a true account of his proceedings. He laid down his bundle, and, untying one of the handkerchief corners, took out a shilling and a sixpence and three pennies, which he handed to her.

'I ped herself down below there the week's money,' he said, 'but I didn't get the bit of tay and sugar you bid me at all. I wasn't at the expinse of it. I just took a sup of the salt wather along wid the pitaties.'

'A sup, bedad!' said Lizzie. 'It's the immense ould sup intirely you'd be a-wantin' along wid that outrageous power of pitaties. Are you after lavin' e'r a dhrop in it at all?'

Still her countenance betrayed the fact that she was mollified, partly by the restoration of one-and-ninepence and partly by the enjoyment of her own sarcasm. So Joe ventured indoors and sat down by the hearth, where a ring of turf-sods, flushing pink among powdery white ashes, shimmered pleasantly

through the gloom. The weather outside was blustery and lowering.

Some minutes had passed silently, when Lizzie, who remained standing at the open door, jumped and shrieked—'Och, saints above, there was a flash of lightnin'!'

But the steely gleam, which had whisked by the window-pane, merely heralded the arrival of a trim, dark-uniformed police constable; who was just dismounting from his well-polished bicycle.

'Beg pardon, ma'am,' he said to Lizzie, 'might a man by the name of Lacken be livin' here?'

'He might so,' said Lizzie, with caution.

'That's just after quittin' out of Roslavin?' pursued the constable.

''Deed is he, and in a quare hurry, too!' Lizzie declared, lapsing into indiscretion, and then added in a panic, 'What's wantin' wid him?'

'Oh, only a little matter about some potatoes,' the constable replied reassuringly.

But Lizzie held up both her hands in solemn horror. 'Mercy be among us, but he's the outlandish crathur! To say he'd not be contint wid swallyin' up enough of pitaties in a couple of days to fatten a prize pig, but he must needs be interferin' wid other people's and runnin' off and bringin' the polis after him, scandalisin' us! Faix, it's the onnathural great gobble-all you are!' she said to Joe, who was coming forward out of the shadows where he had been half-asleep.

'What talk is there about pitaties?' he said.

'Oh, there you are!' said the constable. 'I was thinkin' to overtake you every turn, or bedad I

wouldn't ha' come after you this far. For all I wanted was to ax you did you lave the best part of a sack of potatoes—early Kemps—thrown out among the rocks under the sand-bank a bit below where you was stoppin' at Roslavin?'

'Whethen now, goodness gracious!' Lizzie remarked incredulously, with her hands in the air again.

'And supposin' I did?' Joe said, with a sort of defiant desperation. 'Was I to be breakin' me back luggin' them a matther of ten mile, and I wanted home *immediate*?'

'The raison I axed,' said the constable, 'is because there's that set of tinkers squattin' this while back next Mrs. Dineen's, and the farmers complain they do be interferin' wid the crops. So this mornin' I come on some of the women and childer roastin' themselves pitaties at a great rate. And the women's story was that Mrs. Dineen's lodger was after slingin' them out there last night, and said anybody might take them that liked. And I thought I'd just make a few inquiries previous before I took any further steps. Faix, now, pitaties must be plenty with yous. But it's all right, ma'am, and good day to you, for I'll be late enough back with this wind blowin' straight agin me every way, like as if it was hitched on to one's handle-bar.'

As the constable glided off, Joe said, still defiantly, 'I hope the weeny crathur got a bit that I used to see skytin' about. Starved it looked to be, and it wasn't the size of a rabbit.'

Lizzie said, 'Well, me good man, *I* hope you'll be gettin' your health till you find another sack of

pitaties to pitch around the counthry.' And Joe retreated to the hearth.

After this there was silence and gloom for a long while. Lizzie seemed to be meditating. Perhaps she may have been thinking of Roslavin beach, with the small creature creeping about on it that was hungry, and the big, foolish creature that was in such a hurry to get home again. Be that as it may, at last she said aloud:

'There's a goodish farrel of griddle-cake back of the male-bag under the dresser.'

The statement was not apparently addressed to anybody. Nevertheless, Joe understood it to be made for his information, and felt himself on the highroad to pardon.

Although the neighbours at Kilmaclones hardly distinguished between the individual foolishness of the three Lackens, regarding Lizzie and Thady and Joe alike as omadhauns and stookauns, the Lackens themselves were more discriminating, and all three agreed that Joe was the fool of the family. They were almost equally unanimous in regarding Lizzie as a person of exceptional capabilities and accomplishments, whereas outside her domestic circle she was credited with nothing more brilliant than an occasional flash of temper.

Lizzie herself took her own superiority for granted without conceit. Of Thady's intellect as compared with that of other people, she entertained only a middling opinion, but as contrasted with Joe's, she rated it rather high. And when, a few days after Joe's premature return from Roslavin, Thady was

about to repair thither, Lizzie more than once expressed her certainty that this expedition would not prove such a failure.

'Sure, I knew well enough he 'd make a show of himself by some manner of manes,' she said to Thady at parting. 'But you've more sinse, glory be to goodness, than to go fling a sackful of grand pitaties to loss, as if you was after gatherin' them off the land instead of stones.'

'Why, to be sure, I wouldn't desthroy a sack wid puttin' stones in it at all,' said Thady, who, however sensible, was at times somewhat disappointingly matter-of-fact. 'And no fear but I 'll ate me pitaties, ivery single one, and good luck to them!'

'You 'll have a right to be careful about them tinker childer,' said Lizzie. 'After Joe givin' thim the habit of meddlin' wid his, they might like enough think to be makin' free wid yours.'

'I won't let a spalpeen of them widin an ass's roar of the sack!' Thady averred; and with that he set out.

He was a little more luxuriously provided than Joe had been, for Lizzie had contrived to supplement his potatoes with a bit of bacon and a small bag of wheaten-meal cakes. Mrs. Dineen received him blandly, being prepossessed in favour of the brother of a lodger who had given no trouble, you might say, for his money.

Therefore, as Thady sat by the fire in the dusk, munching his floury supper, which was enriched by a flavour of frizzled rasher, he thought to himself that although he would certainly be 'as plased as anythin'' to see the last of Roslavin, he might be well able to put up with it for a week or two, and

not be 'making a jackass of himself the way Joe done, bouncin' home agin when nobody was thinkin' of him, like a sold baste broke loose.'

Thady spent his first long seaside day, which was still and sparkling, much as Joe had done, in bathing and strolling, and wishing himself suddenly home again at Kilmaclones; an early return, however, seemed even more impossible for him than for Joe, because he felt that he had a reputation to maintain. In the course of the morning he caught several glimpses of the tinkers' children, against whom Lizzie had cautioned him; but her apprehensions appeared unfounded, as, so far from displaying any overboldness, they fled at his approach like so many sandpipers.

On the next morning, however, it happened that after his dip he sat down to bask in the sun under a sand-bank which curved into a pleasantly sheltered hollow, crested with grey-green bent grasses and faint pink thrift. He had brought with him one of his brown three-cornered cakes, to eat at noon, but that hour was still far distant when he sat down, and he had laid his luncheon on a flat stone near by. The hot sun and the rhythmical seething of the waves soon made him drowsy, a condition in which, having no business on hand, he acquiesced with many solemn nods.

But before long some sound or stir flawed the lulling monotony, and, awakening with a jerk, he was aware of a very small boy in ragged grey flannel petticoats standing by the flat stone. The boy had one hand on the brown cake, and on Thady the gaze of two intensely dark eyes, which, seeing him roused,

seemed to widen until they almost coalesced. Then they glanced wildly round the little sunny hollow, and, perceiving no exit that was not effectively and perilously blocked, returned to Thady with desperate effrontery.

'I was mindin' of your cake for you,' said their owner. 'There's a big ould say-gull watchin' this long while to be gettin' a chance of grabbin' it, only he was afraid of his life when he seen *me*!'

'I wouldn't won'er,' said Thady, 'yourself's the quare, frykeful objec', bedad,' and he laughed for the first time since he had lost sight of Lizzie's red shawl and Joe's waving caubeen.

But Thady's sarcastic gifts were limited, and when he had stopped laughing, the only thing he could think of to say was: 'Maybe you'd like a bit, too, same as the gull.'

No pleasantry could well have given greater satisfaction. 'How much,' said the boy, 'will I be breakin' off of it? That much?' He drew an imaginary line which cut the cake most unequally, although he did add, 'I think that 'ud about halve it.'

'Sure, what you like,' said Thady, 'or the whole of it for that matter. I've plinty more at home.'

'Belike, then,' said the ragged child, ''twould be a pity to spoil it wid breakin',' and there appeared instantly a large crescent-shaped gap in the crust.

Thady's new acquaintance, sitting, no longer alarmed, upon an adjacent rock ledge, finished the cake to the last crumb. He conversed intermittently, stating in reply to questions that he lived near the lane back of where they were sitting, and that he was called Thunder-an'-lightnin'. Ignorance of the

fact prevented him from explaining that this portentous name had been bestowed upon him in commemoration of a violent storm which had raged during the first night of his life, passed by him under the grudging shelter of an inverted donkey-cart, by the shore of Lough Moylure, where the tinker troupe happened to be camping.

On taking his leave, Thunder-an'-lightnin' promised to come and mind Thady's bit of food for him the next morning, an engagement which was faithfully kept, with like results to the destruction of the aforesaid bit. Thady was glad of any company and encouraged the visits, which became a regular institution, for when the supply of brown cakes failed, he found that cold potatoes were cared for with equal fidelity.

But his stay at 'the salt wather' drew to a close, and the last morning of it was wildly wet. So fierce were the drop-fledged blasts which flapped about Mrs. Dineen's little house that he did not quit its turf-scented kitchen until well on in the afternoon. Then the wind abated, and he went out for a stroll, the quietly falling rain being in his view a very harmless companion. He walked along the lonely beach toward the hollow where he used to sit, and there, crouched on the bank, and not looking the size of anything, so it struck Thady, he espied the solitary form of Thunder-an'-lightnin'.

Upon perceiving Thady, the child jumped up and rushed at him with a howl of joy and woe, in which the only intelligible statements seemed to be, 'You niver come at all!' and 'Iverybody's went away on me!'

Even when he had grown more composed, the style of Thunder-an'-lightnin's narrative continued to be exclamatory and obscure, and Thady was slow at gathering what had happened. But presently an inspection of the tinkers' camping-ground close by made the matter clear enough. It had evidently been deserted in the night; the company had silently stolen away, leaving this member to shift for himself.

'Well, now, 'twas a quare thing to do,' Thady said disapprovingly, as he surveyed the blackened fire-rings and scattered straw wisps, the only remaining traces of the party. 'This crathur 's not that sizeable that he can aisy contind wid the width of the world all alone be himself.'

Temporarily to avert this unequal contest, Thady brought the 'crathur' back with him to consult Mrs. Dineen, and as she chanced to be out, they awaited her return on the rough stone seat at the door, while Thunder-an'-lightnin' ate cold potatoes with undissembled famine.

And when she came, her view of the case was: 'Ah, now, but weren't they the great villins to quit out of it that way, and lave the misfortnit imp starvin'? I always said it seemed to not belong rightly to any of thim. Its mother 's dead, you may depind. The polis 'll have to be takin' it to the House.'

At this Thunder-an'-lightnin', who was sitting at Thady's feet, uttered a horrified protest. The form it took is noticeable, as showing how widely his experience of life had differed from that of other four-year-olds, who commonly consider 'I don't want to' or 'I don't like it' to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of any distasteful proposition. Thunder-an-lightnin',

in his sore dismay, deemed it expedient to adopt an *argumentum ad hominem*, and he said brokenly, 'Then there—wouldn't be anybody—to mind—your bit of food.'

He repeated it several times, but it apparently made no impression upon Mrs. Dineen, who soon went about her business indoors. Thady, however, remained sitting outside, and every now and then his companion clutched him by the leg and shook it, saying with a sharp shriek, 'Nobody—to be mindin' —your bit of food!' Perplexity deepened upon Thady's face as he looked out through the thickening twilight over the tumbling sea.

Meanwhile, the days had been passing rather blankly up at Kilmaclones, where Joe Lacken often expressed a wish that Thady were home again. Lizzie in her heart wished the same thing, but as she had pledged herself to the belief that '*Thady* would have the wit to stop where he was a raisonable len'th of time,' she always replied, 'Wishin''s fools' work, and it's all some folks are fit for!'

It seemed that her confidence in Thady's sagacity had not been misplaced, for quite a fortnight passed without any signs of his return. Then one very wet afternoon, when Joe and Lizzie were indoors despondding about their patch of flattened oats, Lizzie looked down the lane and exclaimed:

'Here's Himself!' And a few moments later she added: 'And I declare to goodness the man's bringin' back the half of his sack full anyway, that's lasted him betther than a fortnight—and some I could name wid ne'er a skin of a one left after a

couple of days.' But Joe was so busy galloping down the splashy lane to meet his brother that his sister's innuendo fell unheeded.

Thady also seemed preoccupied as he stumped up to the door, and he made not much response to Lizzie's shrill greetings. Just inside he set down his sack, hastily yet warily, as if to do so were at once an anxiety and a relief. And out of it immediately crawled a small shape in grey rags, with a very wet black head.

'It was lost down below on the strand,' Thady said in explanation, breaking a dead silence, which showed ominously the force of the shock.

'I declare now it 's the crathur I seen runnin' about the day I was there,' Joe said. 'But I 'd ha' thought long enough before I took the notion of puttin' it in me bag.'

'And wasn't there plinty of room for it to be where you found it?' said Lizzie. 'And where at all are you bringin' it to, that you 're after lettin' it out about this place? You 'll only have the job of puttin' it back agin.'

'Where *would* I be bringin' it to only here?' Thady said, with elaborate surprise.

Lizzie could not trust herself to answer him directly. 'Sure, wasn't I tired tellin' you, Joe, times and agin, that he 'd be at some fool's antics or other?' she said. 'The saints grant me patience! But anyhow the polis 'll be pathrollin' past here prisintly, and *they 'll* know where to take it. Don't you offer to be stirrin' hand or fut!' she said, with such stormy sternness to Thunder-an'-lightnin' that he seemed to strike root where he stood.

'I do be mindin' his bit of food!' he murmured, with affrighted eyes.

'Ay, bedad, that 's the sort of talk he 'll be ready wid if he was twice as little!' said Lizzie furiously. 'The full of the sack wouldn't contint thim crathurs!'

'I dunno rightly what to say then at all, at all,' Thady said abjectly. He felt in his pocket and appeared to be further depressed by the result, which was nothing.

'I want you to be just steppin' outside for a minyit, man,' said Joe. 'You 'd a right to look at the white heifer, for she 's coughin' that vehement since last night there might be somethin' stickin' in her throath, I have her up here in the shed.' So the two men stepped out into the rain.

About half an hour afterward Joe's head was thrust in at the door so cautiously that he surveyed the interior for some time without being himself observed. The fire had been stirred into a fountain, flinging about many shimmering light-spangles, and in front of it Thunder-an'-lightnin' was now squatting.

Joe noticed that a somewhat cherished scarlet cotton handkerchief of Lizzie's was tucked round his neck, as if for protection against the drippings of his rain-drenched hair. He had in his hand the outline, so to speak, of what had once been a substantial slice of bread, but was now reduced to merely a crusty framework. Lizzie, in the background, seemed to be quietly cutting another piece.

Perceiving these things, Joe suddenly called from the door:

'Hi, Lizzie woman, throw that child out to me! I 'm too ojus wet to be comin' in wid me brogues on,

and I 'm about runnin' down wid it to the barracks. They 'll know there what to be at wid it, and that 's more than we do, I be thinkin'.'

'Arrah, man, where 's the hurry?' Lizzie called back querulously. 'I 'm just gettin' the supper, and it 's rainin' like a sluice.'

'Och, it may be spillin' a sup,' said Joe. 'Where 's the odds? I 'll be no time landin' it down, and then we 'll be shut of it. Throw it to me out of that, an' bother no more wid the crathur.'

'You big omadhaun!' Lizzie said, getting between Thunder-an'-lightnin' and the door. 'Can't you mind your own business and lave meddlin' wid us? It makes no differ to anybody but meself if the crathur stops over the night, at all evints!'

'Have it your own way,' Joe said, and turned about to look out into the grey rain-mists, so that only the back of his head was visible from within; but a grin on his face came very nearly round the corner.

Perhaps some of his acquaintances were not without reason when they occasionally remarked, 'After all, Joe Lacken, for all his quare ways, wasn't such an ould gaby as one might think.'

A STORY ON STICKS

THOSE tall, bare, tarry poles made a wonderful difference, everybody remarked, in the look of the country, and well they might, as hardly anything grows higher on it than a stunted furze-bush. That part of it is, in fact, simply a sweeping expanse of dull olive-green bog, which seems as if it must have been much trampled, anciently, under the hoofs of huge primeval cattle, on so large a scale are its endless round-topped tussocks, each one moated about by the network of narrow fissures in the black peat. Water lies deep at the bottom of them all. You see it glimmer as you stride squelching, or spring splashing, from spongy cushion to cushion. For this is 'a very wet bog entirely.' It shivers all over if even an empty turf-cart comes jiggeting along one of its intersecting tracks, and the passage of a heavy load is attended by shocks of really formidable violence. In stormy times, when the ponderous Atlantic rollers are swinging themselves against the many-buttressed cliffs, and seething over smooth-floored recesses of sand, every assault with its foam and thunder will start vibrations felt underfoot far inland ; as far, that is to say, as one can get on the little Inish of Anashee. Its excessive wetness makes this corner of the wide bogland, Meenmore,

an extremely lonesome place. Nobody can work on it; still less on it can anybody live, except where a stray fleck of drier ground emerging here and there gives room for a single little white cabin to be set down in a skimpy patch of vivid green. Even for sporting purposes it is too sodden and swampy. 'Troth and small blame to the wild crathurs to keep themselves out of it,' used to be a frequent observation of old Syl Walsh, the naturalist, 'unless they 'd a mind to be stiffened up wid a wire of rheumatics run through every bone of their mislucky bodies.' So there is seldom anything to be seen moving upon its monotonous face save the scanty trickle of traffic passing between Fintragh and Lettercosh, the Inish's two hamlets, scattered about the feet of its two mountain-sentinels, Slievelone and Ben Teague.

Under these circumstances people sometimes wonder that it should have been thought worth while to establish telegraphic communications with such an unpopulous and insignificant sort of outpost. And, in fact, Anashee might have waited for them long enough, had not a Person of Importance chosen to build himself a summer house there, and require none the less to be in reach of the latest intelligence. Whereupon ensued the procession of lanky black-coated poles, stalking in single file from a long step beyond the straits which make an Inish of Anashee; and the birds of the air found an additional perch, several miles in length, stretched for them to light upon; and the little Fintragh post-office had a new clerk, who understood the management of the 'rael quare' clicking machine, which was like, somebody said, a sort of a clock and a compass

bewitched, and which formed the central marvel and mystery in this extraordinary method of receiving and sending messages, 'all in a suddint minyit.' Speculation was rife as to the precise means employed, and only a few ultra-conservative minds were content to explain it simply by *pishtrogues*, that is to say, charms.

The Anasheans are stay-at-home folk. Seldom do they journey as far even as to the adjacent mainland, which they call going on shore; and they had hitherto had no experience of the telegraph. Indeed a considerable number of them had not any word for it in their language. For on Anashee the old people are almost all Irish-speaking with little knowledge, or none, of English. Their children generally possess both languages, and converse in one or the other according to convenience. But their grandchildren, being set to unlearn Gaelic at the whitewashed National School, often accomplish that task with a thoroughness which precludes verbal intercourse between the first and third generations. Few of the gossoons and colleens nowadays can speak Irish themselves with fluency, though some still understand it; and curious lopsided dialogues may not uncommonly be heard proceeding in the Sassenach on their own, and the Gaelic on their elders' part. This comes rather hard on the old folk, sometimes afflicting them with, as it were, a kind of twofold deafness, which makes the world seem all the stranger and dimmer to them, as they sit 'bothered and moidhered' in their corners, amid a Babel of meaningless chatter, like exiles in a foreign land. They *collogue* much, however, with

their contemporary neighbours; and now animated discussions were carried on among them, respecting the choice of an appropriate term for the latest wonder of these 'quare times altogether.' The old Gaelic tongue may be dying, yet it still retains at least one characteristic of a living and vigorous language in the capacity for evolving new words, which are genuine, legitimate products of its own, and not illogical misapplications, or incongruous loans, such as 'wire' or 'telegram.' Anthony O'Keefe suggested that they should give it a name signifying: *a fishing-line for news*, and spoke often at length, with much earnest eloquence, in favour of his proposal. But the fancy was too fine-spun for the taste of the majority. That thin tight thread, almost imperceptibly appearing and vanishing on the empty air, could so hardly be imagined the really efficacious element in the matter. Most people put more faith in the tall black posts, which, at all events, 'had the look of being made for something.' Therefore the name finally adopted was: *sgeul ar bata*, 'a story on sticks,' and it remains in use to this day.

It seems suitable enough, for by every message that comes to the office, and goes forth in an ominous tawny envelope, some kind of a tale is pretty sure to hang, and the same may be said of those despatched from thence. Anashee cannot spend sixpences on mere trivialities. Very few of them do come and go, except when the Person of Importance is in residence, and that seldom occurs, as he has grown tired of the place. Perhaps some one might like to learn the contents of the very

first telegram that came clicking into Fintragh post-office? I am able, as it happens, to report them word for word—they were only a carefully counted sixpence-worth—but they need some preliminary explanation to make their purport generally intelligible.

The telegraph-poles might have seemed less certainly essential to the production of those astonishing phenomena, had it not been for the droning hum which runs through them incessantly, audible to even the unheeding passer-by, and swelling into a sonorous wail, if he stop and press his ear against the wood. This experiment at first used to be tried by everybody with deep interest, and sometimes with awe. They compared the sound to all sorts of things, such as 'the say-waves and a cross cow roarin' agin one another in a storm of win',—a duet which may now and then be heard on the surf-bordered pastures of Anashee—'wid a quare kind of lilt through it,' some one would add, 'that you might take for keenin' or singin'.' Many people were vaguely of the opinion that the sound had 'some manner of manin';' but only one person claimed that he could actually make sense of it. This was the above-mentioned Anthony O'Keefe, younger brother of Cornelius O'Keefe, who farms a rather large bit of land near Fintragh, and is better off than most of the islanders.

His neighbours have always held that Anthony is not quite 'all there,' and this belief, although it has the effect of diminishing their regard for his opinion about ordinary matters, does somehow make them attach more than usual weight to it where any-

thing abnormal or occult is concerned. Accordingly they are not inclined to reject him as an interpreter. There is a touch of uncanniness, too, about Anthony's appearance, which helps to heighten the probability of his conversance with secrets and mysteries. So likewise does his propensity for swift and solitary wanderings, that cause his lean, black-frock-coated form to appear promiscuously at and in unexpected times and places. 'That fellow does be skytin' over the counthry,' Syl Walsh has remarked, 'for all the world liked a one of them long-leggy wather-spiders on the smooth of a pond. You never can tell for a second where the fantigue 'll take it to be shootin' itself to next—or him aither.'

On a certain warm, hazy July afternoon, these roving habits brought Anthony to the eastern corner of Anashee, where the broad Meenmore bog merges into a belt of fine short grass, which is all too soon lost again among the sapless grey-green bent and half-buried furze-bushes on the white sand-hills of the shore. For: 'You might think there was a somethin' about in this counthry wid a grudge in it,' I have heard Pather Maguire dolefully declare, 'that would be doin' its best to skimp every mortal baste of gettin' a bite or sup.' Just here meet two roads, one skirting the beach, the other striking out across the width of the bog towards Fintragh, with the telegraph posts keeping it company. Under the first of these, on a swarded bank, Anthony found three people reclining in a scanty shadow; a couple of small boys, and a tall young man. Larry and Pat Lenihan lived close by, and were minding their goat, as little gossoons may, when lucky enough to

find such a good excuse for not attending school; but Christy Rourke had come from Anthony's district away beyond the bog near Fintragh, and the blue-handkerchiefed bundle which lay beside him showed that he was leaving home, as young fellows must sometimes, 'like it or lump it.' Christy was lumping it, to judge by his looks, which were downcast and moody.

'Musha, and is it yourself, Christy?' Anthony said upon recognising him. 'I 'd ha' thought you 'd be across the ferry agin now, for I seen you startin' off out of our place this mornin' at all hours of earliness, ould ages, anyway, before I quit.'

'Sure, where 's the hurry?' Christy replied gloomily. 'I 'm sleepin' at me uncle's, over beyant Goulanephin, and if I get there by dark, 'twill be plinty time enough. It 's an outrageous hot day; I 'm kilt thrampin' under the sun's blazes.'

'That 's because you haven't the wit to be thinkin' of somethin' diff'rint all the while goin' along,' said Anthony. 'I 'm tired tellin' people they had a right always to be doin' one thing and thinkin' of another, and then they wouldn't git torminted.'

'Bedad now, that 's accordin' to what the other thing was,' said Christy. 'I should suppose there might be many a one 'ud only tormint you twice as much.'

Anthony presumably was not prepared to defend his favourite theory from this particular point, for sitting down, and leaning against the post, he observed with an abrupt change of subject: 'To your sowls, but there 's a great whillaloo goin' through it this minyit. What are they at wid it at all at all?'

Larry and Pat at once sought to listen with such

precipitation that their heads collided from opposing sides of the pole; after which Larry, having kicked his junior, said: 'Deed is it, howlin' mad. But that's all I hear—like the win' in a hole—ne'er a word whatsome'er—or the river under the bridge when it gits among the stones.'

'And what else would the likes of you be settin' yourself up to be hearin'?' said Anthony. 'If the river was swimmin' thick wid troutses, divil a one you'd catch wid just lookin' at the runnin' wather. It's a line you'd want to fetch them out. And it's the very same way wid the runnin' sound. Sorra the word there's in it unless for them that has the sinse to be fishin' out the manin'. Up there over our heads—it's a line, so to spake, dropped into the noises of the world, same as a line dropped into the say. That's what I do be tellin' the folk up at our place, but they're as stubborn as pigs wid their *Story on Sticks*, begob are they——'

'And what are you hearin' in it now?' Christy inquired hurriedly, less from curiosity than eagerness to avert a recapitulation of those arguments.

Anthony replied with mysterious mien: 'Och, that would be tellin',' but almost immediately began to tell, with one ear applied to the resonant pole, and one eye, shining from beneath a furtive, grizzled black fringe, fixed steadily upon Christy.

'Let me see now,' he said, 'it's about lads it is mostly—two lads and a letter—it must ha' got that comin' through some post-office. And Mack's the name of them: Jack Mack and Mick Mack—young chaps, much of an age.'

'Jack Mack and Mick Mack—Micky Macky, Jacky Macky,' Pat began to say, with delighted

chuckles, and seemed disposed to continue the repetition, but was peremptorily bidden by everybody to 'hould his gab.'

'Livin' at home wid their mother, they are,' Anthony proceeded. 'That's a widdy, and as dacint a poor woman as ever I—or anybody—seen, and farms the little bit of land she has, away at our —about the distance of from here to our own place —she and the two sons. And an ould uncle she has livin' on shore, as far, maybe, goin' in the opposite direction. I disremimber the name of it—I mane I can't exactually hear it. He's a warm man, anyhow, they say; Faylix Rooney his name is, and the grand-daughter—Rose they might be callin' her—is an oncommon pretty-lookin' slip of a girl, bedad, is she, *red hair or no.*' Anthony emphasised the last words strongly, while intensifying his watch on Christy. 'Well, now, the ould man, havin' ne'er a child of his own left, always thought a dale of his niece the widdy's sons, these two fellows, Jack Mack and Mick Mack. You be aisy there, tee-heein', Pat Lenihan; what else would I be callin' them by, barrin' their own names? But the one of the two he thought the most of ever was Mick the youngest. If you axed me me own opinion, I wouldn't say but that Jack was the makings of a better man. Not that there's any great harm in Mick, mind you, but Jack most whiles seems to be more raisonable in his notions, and plisanter in his timper.'

'And he might be that same, begorrah, and none too raisonable or plisant all the while,' commented Christy.

'Ah, sure now, Mick's apt to be gittin' more wit prisintly; he's no very ould age on him yit. And there's a dale of good nature in him, I'm thinkin'. Leastways, so they're talkin' inside here,' Anthony continued, ostentatiously listening again. 'Only of an odd while when he gits annoyed. And the trouble this time was all about an old skewbald pony. You see the way of it was, the mother of Jack and Mick does sometimes be hard set to get along, for the conthrariness of things is onaisy enough for anybody to contind wid, says she, let alone a widdy woman on a little bit of wet lan'. And the winther and spring we're just after comin' through bates all for as unchancy a saison as I have in me remimbrance. And that was the raison why Mick took off wid himself about Easter to thry could he save a thrifle at a job of work he'd heard of over in Glasgow. So the widdy after that had some bad luck and losses, that kep' her behindhand a bit wid her rint, and when the uncle, ould Faylix Rooney, heard tell of it, what does he do but offers to buy the ould skewbald off her for a five-pound note? Faix, now, tellin' you the truth, the baste isn't worth it, and 'twas only be way of a compliment and convanience to her he done such a thing; for the crathur's as ould as a blind crow, and that broken-winded you'll hear it along the road ten minyits before you see it; and has a bog-spavin on the off hind leg of it the size of a jackdaw's nest.'

'And, more betoken, as cross as a weasel, you might say,' put in Christy. 'Would as lief take a bite out of your arm as look at you, if it got the chance.'

'Well, at all events,' Anthony went on, 'the ould

man said 'twould do them finely just to drive under the car wid Rose as far as the short step to Mass of a wet mornin', and other times 'twould be welcome to the run of its teeth in the field, and a wisp of hay in the shed. So the widdy and Jack were both of them ready and willin' to let him have the crathur, and small blame to them. Howane'er, you must know, the youngest son, Mick, had always the greatest opinion of it at all. He consaited the aquil of it didn't exist on Anashee; and when he got word in Glasgow of the ould pony bein' sold out of the place, leppin' he was and ragin' mad. And he up and he writes home the most outrageous letter to his brother Jack, that they got last night.'

'Outrageous you may call it,' said Christy.

'Givin' them all dog's abuse,' said Anthony. 'For the buyin' and sellin', and sayin' ivery sort of thing agin his ould uncle and the grand-daughter, Nellie——'

'I thought you said it was Rose they called her,' Larry objected.

'Who's talkin' now?' said Pat.

'Rose she is, to be sure—I heard wrong that time,' Anthony said, listening once more. 'And he took and passed a remark about her hair bein' red. "I give you me word he did," says his poor mother. "And, in coorse, no girl in the world 'ud look the way he was after that," says she. Done for himself entirely he has, if ever it comes to their knowledge over at Kilmacrone.'

'I thought you said you disremimbered'—a shrill voice began, but it was silenced in some sudden way.

'They'll have no more to say to him, that's

certain,' said Anthony, 'and he that was always so great wid them, troth was he. But you see Jack was downright infuriated wid the letter, and maybe no wonder; and as ill-luck would have it, he 'd settled to be steppin' over this very next day, and bring along the ould pony, and sleep the night at his uncle's, on his way to a job of work in the county Roscommon. And what 's he done but took Mick's outrageous letter wid him to show to the uncle and Rose? And it full of *ould robbers* and *red-nobs*, and the mischief knows all. Their poor mother thried her best to dispersuade him of bringin' it, but sorra a word would he mind her.'

'And why wouldn't he take it?' said Christy. 'Didn't the young rapscallion say as plain as he could write he didn't care who seen it, and anybody might repate ivery word of it, and welcome, over at Kilmacrone?'

'Och, maybe he did,' said Anthony. 'She didn't tell me—I mane I don't hear it that way. But supposin' so itself? Sure there 's plinty of foolish talk people has out of them when they 're annoyed about anythin' that 's gone agin thim, and no manin' does be in it, good or bad. Look at the say over there whitewashin' the black rocks,' Anthony said, pointing across a silvery foreground of sand, and a creek of blue water, to the dark wall of cliffs with a tossing snow-line at their base. 'You 'd think it had a notion of knockin' thim flat wid its rowlin' agin thim. But sure not at all. Just a sign it is there 's been some rough weather out beyant the bay. And that 's so to spake the way the young chap was flingin' himself about like, when he wrote his fool's letter.

Sorry enough he may be by now—and it this moment of time walkin' over to his frinds in his brother's pocket. Through fire and wather Mick 'ud go for any one of thim, his mother says, if he wasn't deminted wid his fantigue about the ould pony.'

'Is it anyways like *his* ould baste?' Larry inquired, pointing to Christy with his thumb. 'For it's as ugly as ever I seen.'

Larry was finding this part of the story intolerably dull, but Anthony would not be interrupted: 'And if Mick himself doesn't mind,' he went on, 'his poor mother at any rate's in the greatest distraction over it, by raison of all the ugly mischief it's apt to make. Says she: "Sure, Jack wouldn't go for to do it all, if he considhered a bit, for he's a rael good-natured fellow. But off he's took wid himself hot-fut, and he'll ha' done it before he knows rightly where he is," says she. And says she: "It's a sort of thing you can do while the clock's strikin' one; but that git undone agin you can't, if you had while it would be strikin' ivery mislucky hour from now till the world's indin'." So says I to her: "Mayhappen he might have time to change his mind while he would be thrampin' over to his uncle's place, that's a good long step," says I——'

'I didn't know you knew the mother of Jack Mack and Mick Mack?' Pat said, and stared interrogatively.

'There's a dale of things there's no call for little spalpeens to know,' Anthony replied with loftiness, and resumed: 'Truth to say, I misdoubt if there's much chance he will. For I've an idea in me mind that Jack does be gittin' more than a trifle jealous now and agin of his mother and the ould uncle

thinkin' that much of his brother ; because the both of them had always a great wish altogether for Mick let alone if be any chance Jack had e'er a thought of the grand-daughter—Rose. Mind you,' Anthony said, fixing his furtive gaze still more steadily upon Christy, 'I 'm not *hearin'* any such thing : it 's just a notion I have of me own. But in coorse if that was the way of it, he 'd be all the readier to take advantage of any bit of foolery Mick might have went and done, that 'ud give himself an ugly appearance, and make the girl and iverybody think bad of him. 'Twould be only natural, maybe, in his brother Jack, and you couldn't expect anythin' differint.'

'Well now, yourself's the comical man,' Christy said, closely examining the texture of the worn turf-carpet. 'It 's the quare romancin' you have about blathers and nonsense and nothin' at all.'

'Nothin' to you it may be,' said Anthony, 'but it 's a dale to your—to the mother of the lads I was tellin' you about. Frettin' herself woeful over it she was this mornin'. Wonderin' I was what misfortin ailed her, when I seen her cryin' away fit to fill her bucket, and she fetchin' wather at the little ould well, the time I went by. So then she tould me all about it. 'Deed, now, I 'm sorry in me heart for the crathur, worryin' herself there her lone.'

'It 's just a pack of lies you 're puttin' on me,' Christy said, clutching his bundle suddenly and bouncing up. 'I well know she 's more wit than to be frettin' about any such thing—a dale more. She was apt to get a bit discouraged bein' left all by herself—divil aught else ailed her. And I 'll not be stoppin' away from her very long.'

His general smouldering ill-humour seemed to have flared into a special resentment, and he stood swinging his baggage defiantly, as if waiting for some further affront or contradiction.

'Sure then, plase yourself,' Anthony said, twirling himself round away from the oracular pole, and beginning to fumble for his pipe, 'very belike you can hear and see ten mile off —— It's no need you have to be throublin' yourself wid gettin' a story off the sticks for other people.'

'There now, you 've gone and stopped him,' Larry said reproachfully, glowering up at Christy, 'and I was just about axin' him the ould pony's name. Git on, Anthony O'Keefe, there 's a good man, and niver mind him. *I* believe ivery word you 're after sayin', lies or no.'

But at this moment a barking sound rose hard by, and over the crest of the nearest sand-hillock a small pony plunged at a clumsy canter, with a yapping, reddish-brown, short-legged terrier wriggling along in pursuit. And—'Land's sakes, if Thady 's took to his capers, it 's time for the pair of us to be steppin' on,' Christy said. 'For ne'er a minyit's pace he 'll lave me. So good-day to you all.'

Whereupon he captured the dangling rope-bridle, and departed, leading Thady, a rough, parti-coloured animal, with quaintly-cropped ears and shaggy feet. Christy's countenance wore a rigidly resolute expression.

About an hour later, somebody thrust a head in at the door of the miscellaneous store, which contains also the little post-office of Skaine, the first village you come to after going on shore from Anashee.

'I'm wishful,' it said, 'to be sendin' one of them telingrams.'

'Then why don't you step indoors and write it down on the form?' said the presiding official, rather tartly.

'How can I, unless I'd bring the baste I've got here in wid me?' was the answer. 'When it's leggin' home on me he'd be, if I let go me holt of him half an instiant.' So the message was dictated from outside, and paid for with a sixpence, which had been destined for the purchase of more substantial goods.

Now this same telegram, which towards sunset reached the office at Fintragh, was the very first one to be received there. Its arrival seemed such an important event that the tawny envelope was conveyed to its destination by Mr. Crowe of the shop himself, with an escort of several neighbours, all curious in their minds. These people were, I dare say, somewhat disappointed when they heard its contents read aloud, and may have felt disposed to form a poor opinion of such communications, as being meagre and obscure. But to the person most concerned, who had been sitting forlornly by her faded hearth, and forecasting black troubles ahead, it was quite intelligible, and so consolatory that she made herself a cup of tea, and went to bed with a much lightened heart.

This was the telegram verbatim: '*From* Christy Rourke, Skaine, *To* Mrs. Rourke, Fintragh. *It's tore up. Don't be fretting.*'

And meanwhile along the wide, grassy-bordered road to Kilmacrone, the wind was having a paper-chase with a handful of white fragments which looked as if they had once formed a letter.

PERRY'S SHOW

UP at Clonfaragh any one who makes an obviously absurd excuse is very apt to be met with the ironical rejoinder, 'Ay, bedad, to ax the price of a pinny stamp.' This saying dates from a time, many years back, which is still remembered as a period when more events than usual happened in the neighbourhood, and it was occasioned by one of these. In those days the post-office was kept by Mrs. Orpen and her daughters, all of them ungenial stuck-up people, whose curt and morose manners cast a gloom over the neighbours' small transactions about money-orders and the correct stamping of letters to the States, that must be 'terrible light intirely' to escape the extra twopence-halfpenny. 'You might think they was expectin' it to thravel across,' disconsolately declared Michael Byrne, who wrote a wild space-devouring hand, 'on a weeny waft of the win', like a wisp of thistledown blowin' over a hedge.' So the post-office, at the corner of the row, facing the pump, was a place little resorted to, except strictly on business.

But at the time I speak of a change occurred. One spring morning there was suddenly displayed on the board below the inquiry window a large and resplendent picture, such as had never before been

seen in Clonfaragh, where posters are unknown, and where Christmas numbers seldom come. It was very highly coloured, chiefly in scarlet, for it represented an assorted group of the British army in the fullest possible uniform, cavalry and infantry, dragoons and hussars, Highlanders and riflemen, with mounts and accoutrements all complete, and as brilliant as much vermilion and varnish could make it. At the foot of it were set forth in bold type the various advantages that would accrue to him who joined the service, but this commentary was disregarded by most of the people who came to marvel and admire. Some of them could not have read it—for instance, the spalpeens in crimson home-spun petticoats, whose heads during the first day or two were thickly clustered, hardly on a level with the ledge of the window, and had to be dispersed ever and anon by an indignant flinging open, and a peremptory injunction from within to run along out of that. The children's elders could not be dealt with quite so summarily; however, they were less frankly obtrusive in manifesting their curiosity. They preferred to find some pretext for visiting the post-office, and it might have been noticed in those days that a single letter was often escorted to the receiver by a party of six or seven, while the number of persons who required information about postal arrangements seemed unusually large. Women and girls, meeting at the pump, and emboldened by numbers, would troop in undisguisedly to stare, so that at times as many as half a dozen cleanly filled cans were ranged shining along the whitewashed house-wall outside, since to bring them splashing

into the neatly-tiled porch would have been an act of impossible temerity.

It was upon one of these occasions that the speech was made which afterwards became such a familiar quotation in and about Clonfaragh. For just when Nannie Dermody was most deeply rapt in contemplation of the intricate gold-braid gridiron pattern which adorned the blue jacket of a splendid hussar, the window above her head flew up with a rattling jerk, and Mrs. Orpen's crossest voice inquired whether she wanted anything. So Nannie, startled and abashed, lost all her presence of mind, and answered in her flurry, 'Sure I only come to ax the price of a pinny stamp.' Whereupon young Con Neligan, the letter-carrier, waiting there for his bag, and overhearing this piece of folly, proceeded to spread it all through the parish without delay. Yet Con was not disposed to take an altogether jocular view of the martial picture. He often studied the particulars printed beneath it, and his daily rounds were much haunted by visions of a gayer garb than this crimson-collared coat, and of promotion and pay, and prospects of seeing the world, and chances of acquiring honour and glory in feats of arms against what he vaguely termed 'naygurs.' As he thought of these things he tramped to an inaudible march-music, and made a knapsack of his letter-bag. But if he happened to come in sight of the Aherns' cottage or one of its inhabitants, his soldierly strides lost their decision, and he let his bag hang loosely down in a quite peaceful manner. Nor was Con the only youth in the neighbourhood to whom civilian life seemed a some-

what faded thing beside that depicted in this remarkable work of art.

Before long, however, its interest was eclipsed by the appearance of something in the same line, still gaudier and more impressive. For just then, walls and yard-gates, and tree-trunks, round about Clonfaragh, which had never hitherto known anything livelier than Poor-Law notices or advertisements of hay auctions, were suddenly brightened up by flaring yellow posters, vivid enough to shine like a tarnished moon down a long length of lane or street. They represented a scene full of lurid lights and hues, in which a magenta highwayman held an enormous pistol to the head of a solemn, purple personage, while a frantic grass-green lady implored for mercy on her knees; and they heralded the arrival of Perry's travelling theatre, whose visit to Clonfaragh was one of the chief events in a memorable May. It came in three or four high-piled carts, and a caravan with a stove-funnel, and it established itself in a corner of Kavanagh's centrally situated field, where its unpacking was watched by all the neighbouring children, roosted in rows along the grassy bank, thick as sparrows about a streak of spilt grain. And thenceforward the goal of their desires lay in what the advertisement described as Aërial Cars, but what they called unceremoniously 'swing-swongs,' just as they clipped the official Theatre of Varieties into merely 'the Show.' None the less did the performances in the pink-and-white striped shed appear to them a very stately pageant, and their elder brethren and parents were almost equally impressed. In fact, the whole district was

stirred, and came tramping on foot, or jolting in donkey-carts, from many miles round to behold the spectacle.

To nobody, however, did it seem quite so fascinating as to Ellen Ahern, a young girl who lived with her grandfather and father and Uncle Nicholas in the cottage at the head of Derryloonin Creek. The neighbours said of her that 'the crathur had a lonesome time of it altogether, wid them three ould men, who hadn't as much liveliness among them as would hearten up a tomtit.' Which was true enough; for the Aherns were silent, solemn people, who spent most of their days out fishing, and had but little to say for themselves when they returned. Their house, too, stood so much out of the way, down the short length of *boreen* running behind Dr. Exham's place, that Ellen was isolated from the life of the village, and except at Mass seldom saw any society. Solitude was therefore her portion. They had not even chickens nor a pig, and, as her domestic duties were few and her other resources for occupation small, her hours lagged and dragged. Often she looked back with regret to the home, well filled with faces and voices, of her first dozen years, broken up, half as long since, by the death of her dead mother's mother. Perry's Show had no attractions at all for her sleepy, grumpy relatives, and she would probably never have had a sight of it, only that good-natured old Mrs. Bell stepped over to fetch her on an evening when anything specially grand was in the programme. Ellen looked on enraptured. Flaring lights and colours, music of piano-organ and concertina, the songs and dances, the ranting and

joking, the crowd with its applause and laughter, were a fresh and exhilarating experience, which filled her nights with dreams and her dull days with memories. Most vivid among these was always the figure of Miss Rosina de Lisle—in private life Minnie Perry—who acted the beautiful lady in the melodramatic highway robbery, wearing a dress that shone like satin, with a necklace that flashed like diamonds, and whose singing and dancing alway evoked the wildest cheers. Old Martha Collins, bedridden in a cabin hard by, said it did one's heart good to hear them: one might think that every livin' sowl in the counthry was bein' massacreed. Not that Martha was any means a malevolent old woman, as this remark might lead you rashly to infer. Ellen Ahern thought that so to dance and sing, in such superfine clothes, would be in itself dearly delightful; but those peals of praise, claps, stamps, and shouts were positively intoxicating; only to hear without sharing them made her feel giddily excited, as if by the odour of strong wine. Now and then, in her long hours of lonely leisure, she amused herself by attempting an imitation of Miss Rosina's performance; but this led to a mortifying incident, which discouraged her a little. One afternoon, when she was pirouetting round the empty kitchen, and rendering 'The Young May Moon' as much like her model as she could, she twirled against and almost knocked down her grandfather, who entered unexpectedly, and indignantly wanted to know if 'the girl had gone clane deminted, to be spinnin' herself about the place like a crazy teetumtotum, and caterwaulin'

like a kitten wid the staggers.' So she retreated into her small room, where she distracted herself with the doubtful joy of surveying her new possessions, splendid and spoiled.

For quite lately what seemed a narrow escape of a piece of great good luck had come to her, indirectly, as will be seen, through the instrumentality of Perry's Show.

Its arrival at Clonfaragh had coincided with the homecoming of Dr. and Mrs. Exham from their honeymoon. Thus it chanced that the green caravan, lumbering along through the dusk, an ungainly shape with tall upstanding funnel, was overtaken in the middle of the Herbertstown bog-road by Dan Ryan's skittish jennet, conveying a cartful of the Exhams' luggage from the station. Whereupon Nelly so much misliked the looks of the stranger vehicle, that she suddenly bolted across the bog in a wild career, which was not checked until the topmost box had been shaken off into the black mouth of a deep hole. Such a deep one it was, indeed, that no rescue of its prey could be attempted without daylight and ropes, which were unattainable before morning. Then it was hauled up with difficulty out of the brown water. But as its fabric was wicker, and a snaggy branch of bogwood had pierced its lining on one side, the state of its contents after a night's soaking gave cause for serious apprehensions, which, when it at last reached its owner, were presently proved to be well founded.

The Exhams' house stood on the foot-slope of a hill, a spur of which shut it off from the sea-fronting village. It was just a four-roomed cottage with

attics, though the Widdy Loughlin, who had been scrubbing out the kitchen, did exclaim upon meeting its new mistress, 'Och, glory be to goodness, melady, but yourself's the young crathur to be comin' into such a wide house.' Ethel Exham had left a very much wider one, with many other things to correspond, when she became the wife of Dr. Exham of Clonfaragh Dispensary. In fact, by so doing, if she had not actually 'disobliged her family,' as the saying is, she had caused general disappointment and disapprobation. Her wedding had been celebrated without brilliancy, and her trousseau was not at all what it would have been had she achieved a more presentable match. Still, it greatly exceeded those ordinarily possessed by the brides of young and struggling country practitioners; and the submerged trunk contained the very flower of it—all her evening dresses. Darkly dripping it was carried by Jerry Quin and Con Neligan up the steep footpath to the front door, and along the passage which bisected the house and at the back door became a path again. Here they deposited their burden, and went in quest of the mistress, who quickly came with a key to ascertain the extent of the damage. It was evidently serious and irremediable. The coffee-coloured peaty water and black ooze had made broad and ineffaceable marks upon sheeny satins and silks, and wrought havoc among delicate chiffons and laces. A brief inspection sufficed to show that hardly anything could have escaped uninjured, or indeed be in a by any means wearable condition.

Mrs. Exham stood looking with somewhat mingled

feelings at the stained folds of a dainty peach-blossom bengaline which lay uppermost. On the whole, she thought that she did not altogether deplore the accident. She had made up her mind steadfastly to turn her back upon all sorts of luxury and frivolity, and the disaster to her wardrobe seemed to give her a push—rather a rough one, perhaps—in the direction whither she would go. Yet she could not behold the destruction of her pretty things without a pang which made her feel that it would be a relief to have them out of her sight. As she glanced round her instinctively for somebody to remove the disagreeable object, she became aware of a tall young girl who was standing close by, and looking on eagerly with grey eyes shining from beneath the shelter of a heavy greenish shawl. This was Ellen Ahern, whose grandfather had sent her at the earliest moment possible to ask 'would Dr. Exham think too bad of lettin' him have a sup of the stuff agin the rheumatism, that every joint in his body was creakin' wid, like an ould rusty door.' And Mrs. Exham on a sudden impulse said, 'Oh, I wonder whether you would care to take away these things, box and all? I don't want to keep them now, and I should be very glad if they were of any use to you.'

If she had been an older and more experienced person, or if she had reflected a little further, she might have doubted the prudence of bestowing this bedraggled finery all at once upon a bare-footed peasant maiden. But her years did not much exceed Ellen's own, and she spoke with no more consideration of consequences than if she had been trans-

ferring some discarded garments to her late fastidious French Elise. As for Ellen, her bewildered incredulity merged quickly into joyful acceptance of this astonishing windfall, which Con Neligan obligingly carried home for her, watched down the *boreen* with somewhat jealous eyes by the Widdy Loughlin, who thought that her charing gave her a stronger claim to benefit by the strange Quality's curious 'fantigue.'

A closer examination of the trunk, however, brought some disappointment with it. Even when Ellen had dried and shaken out and re-folded everything as carefully as she could, the ravages wrought by the soaking to which it had been subjected remained lamentably conspicuous. Woeful to contemplate were the mirky patches, many and large, which stood out boldly on the pale glistening salmon-pinks and *eau-de-nils* and heliotropes—all Ethel Wandesforde's favourite colours. Only one dress, saved by its central situation, had escaped unharmed, and that was a pure white nun's-veiling, very fine and soft, with clouds about it of gossamer net and fairylike silken bows. Not a fleck had marred these, and they were lovely to look upon; yet they gave Ellen little pleasure. For in her mind had arisen a doubt whether she were justified in keeping the dress, since it was unspoiled. She thought that she should perhaps restore it to Mrs. Exham; and the scruple so worried her that at last she wrapped the cause thereof up in several old newspapers and stowed it away out of sight, until she could decide this case of conscience. The other things she often spread out and admired, and

wondered at, and mourned over, fretted by a feeling that even if they had not been so disfigured she could never have worn such attire at Clonfaragh. Why, they were as grand as Miss Rosina's gaudiest costumes—and prettier, she thought. She could not fancy herself putting one on to go to chapel among the neighbours in the broad light of day. But she did frequently imagine herself, splendidly arrayed, singing and dancing in that magical world behind that torn grimy curtain and those smokily flaring lamps. Each time that she examined her new possessions, she seemed to hope less and wish more for the chance of so glorious a destiny.

One very showery Sunday afternoon, when she had owned them for about a fortnight, she took advantage of her family's absence at old Debby Daly's funeral to give them an airing before the kitchen fire. She had just finished arranging them on all the chair-backs before it, when the lowering sky suddenly assumed a blacker scowl, and amid a fierce rush of rain somebody scurried past the window and bolted unceremoniously in at the door. No less a person it was than Mrs. Perry herself, wife and, as people said, manageress of the proprietor of Perry's Show, who, on a holiday stroll towards the strand, had been overtaken by the downpour, and thus precipitately sought shelter for a perishable best bonnet. Her attention was immediately caught by the display of glimmering silks, which seemed to shine through the dusky room with a light of their own. Almost her first remark was, 'That's a fine collection you have there. Is them the sort of washin' you do be takin' in at Clonfaragh?'

Ellen thereupon related the history of the trunkful so far as she knew it, and Mrs. Perry listened with gleaming and busy eyes. She was a born dressmaker, and her circumstances had called for much exercise of her art. In the fine ill-fated clothes before her she recognised a worthy field for her skill, and felt an artist's disinterested eagerness to be at work upon it. As she scanned them with sight and touch, she expatiated eloquently upon the possibilities of altering gores and pleats, and turning breadths, and throwing two skirts into one, unfolding designs the ingenuity of which Ellen could appreciate though she felt herself sadly incompetent to carry them out.

'They'd have been a little fortune now, to a girl like my Minnie,' Mrs. Perry said, wistfully eyeing a broad old-gold sash. 'That yaller 'd go delightfully with the puce, and a couple of big loopy bows, *buffoned* up, would hide every bit of the stains in front. But sure Minnie's quittin' the Theatre. About gettin' married she is to a fine young man—foreman he is over a first-class grocery establishment in Mallow. Thirty-five shillings a week salary, and to be ris; but we'll be put about without her. Of course we'll have to get another girl for the singin' and dancin' business, and costumes she'll be wantin' anyhow. 'Twould be a sinful pity if the likes of these went to loss. I wonder now what you'd take for the lot of them?' she continued, rubbing a fold of glossy pink between a hankering finger and thumb. 'They're worth nothin' only for makin' over again'—

'I wish you'd take meself along wid them,' Ellen

said abruptly. 'I 'd be lonesomer widout them, and I 'd like the business well, I 'm thinkin'. I 've a notion of singin',' she added, with diffidence, 'and I 've learned two diff'rint pattrons of steps.'

'And I declare to goodness you wouldn't look too bad anyway, if you was rightly dressed,' Mrs. Perry exclaimed, struck by a sudden thought as she glanced from the coveted finery to its young owner, who stood there, tall, slender, and pretty, but a little ragged. 'Why shouldn't you come along, for a while, at all events—on a trial trip you might say? And if you brought them with you, I could make them as good as new—could see was they fit for anything. They might be, or they might not. But you 'd be welcome while I was tryin', and there 's plenty of odd jobs you could give us a hand in, let alone the performances, that you might make an offer at— My word but that 's a grand bit of box-plaitin' on this flounce—it 's sumpchus.'

Her thought whisked after it a rapid train. In the first place, here was an unexpected chance of acquiring some most valuable properties for their company, whose wardrobe stood in much need of replenishing. Then she considered that the girl might possibly prove to be capable of taking Minnie's place, but that, if not, it would be easy enough to get rid of her, and without giving up the dresses either. By an arrangement, suppose, according to which they should be considered an equivalent for board and lodging. 'And only fair and raisonable; for what better than harm would the likes of them be apt to do the likes of her?' Mrs. Perry argued, already projecting herself into the situation.

'She might think herself uncommonly lucky, if she got a nice jaunt round the country in the caravan in the fine weather, and was maybe dropped, after a couple of months or so, at some place within raich of this.'

But though the plan seemed so obviously to Ellen's advantage, she did not fall in with it, as it was constructed, on the spur of the moment. At first, indeed, she was startled and somewhat scared at finding her wish, uttered more than half in jest, taken up so seriously. It was as if a door, against which she had idly pushed, supposing it locked, had jerked open at her touch. Her visitor had to put forward many more arguments before she began to regard the project as by any means tenable, and a second call on the following Sunday found her still entertaining a host of doubts, which Mrs. Perry's eloquence but partially dispersed. Most likely it would eventually have failed in attaining its object, though she exerted all her persuasive powers, stimulated by the chance of this enrichment of their stores at a nominal cost,—'for there 's as much wasted among us,' she said to herself, 'as would feed the girl twice over,'—had not other circumstances worked together towards the same result.

One of these was a rheumatic attack which just then afflicted Ellen's grandfather and his family. Peter Ahern was not at the best of times a pleasant-tempered old man, and when the creakiness of his joints compelled him to remain indoors his moroseness became exceeding. From morn till eve he sat by the hearth grumbling and scolding. It seemed to Ellen that his censorious eye was upon her

perpetually, and his acrimonious criticisms were in her ears as continually as the ticking of the clock, which got through its rounds so very, very slowly on those interminable long-lighted spring afternoons. Of pains and aches and sleepless nights she had had no experience to teach her sympathy and forbearance, and the lesson she drew from her present visitation was the not exactly ethical one, that disagreeable company is far worse than none. The practical application which she made of it was that she should endeavour to escape as much as possible from that moping presence. But if she retreated into her little room, her grandfather was certain to shout for something the next minute. It never occurred to her to suppose any causes other than 'ugliness' and 'contrariness' for his querulous gloom, nor to conjecture about the length of his monotonous day. Her only concern about him was that he should 'let her be.' So, when he occasionally tried to get up a little amicable gossip, she thought it, of the two, more tiresome than his complaints and fault-finding, and would never enlarge upon any subject, nor be at the pains of conveying items of news past the barrier of his deafness. Earnestly she wished him able to go about again 'out of that,' but there was no saying how long he mightn't be stuck on top of her. The prospect was detestable.

Another cause of dissatisfaction was the conduct of Con Neligan, the boy who carried the mails. Ellen would have assured anybody that Con was nothing to her, and that he was welcome to stay away as long as he pleased, and longer, for aught she cared. Yet this happy indifference did not

prevent her from wondering why in the past few weeks he had held aloof from her on Sundays after Mass, and had given up looking in to pass the time of day of a morning, going by with his letters. The truth was that Con had been of late distracted by two conflicting desires. He wanted to go a-soldiering and see the world, and he wanted to marry Ellen Ahern and settle down in a comfortable situation, which he had had the offer of, a couple of miles off at Moylone. If he had felt sure of Ellen's consent, he would not have hesitated to dismiss all martial dreams. But he was too diffident and too proud to be hasty in risking a repulse, and the army did offer a tempting alternative. Consequently he kept out of Ellen's way, and divided his thoughts between her and glorious campaigns; which she, of course, could not understand.

All this inclined her to think more and more favourably of Mrs. Perry's suggestion. To travel hither and thither in the gay little green caravan with its gleaming muslin-curtained windows, and to take part nightly in brilliant scenes beneath the pink-and-white striped tent, must be a life, she believed, full of charming possibilities. For instance, they might some day wander back again here to Clonfaragh, and she might dance before Con Neligan in her favourite pale-blue silk, and sing 'The Rose of Shining Shannon' to a concertina accompaniment —a triumph delightful merely to imagine. Accordingly, when Mrs. Perry stepped up one day to tell her she must now decide one way or the other, Ellen smuggled her by the back door into the little room and showed her the wicker trunk packed

ready for a journey. Whereupon Mrs. Perry sent their handy man to fetch it without delay, and as soon as the dusk had deepened safely Ellen stole out and followed it.

Well knowing that leave would be vainly asked, she only despatched a message home next morning to explain how Mrs. Perry was taking her for a bit of a jaunt; and from Tuam she wrote again, alleging as a reason for her prolonged absence that she had been invited to stay with the Perrys over their daughter's wedding. To neither of these communications did she ever receive an answer; but the silence seemed less ominous than it would otherwise have done, because the caravan's wandering made the loss of a letter a probable conjecture. Ellen reassured herself by adopting it, and supplemented it with the belief that her eventual return to Clonfaragh would be brilliant enough to dazzle all disapprobation out of even her grandfather's critical eyes.

Nevertheless, about three months later she found herself trudging into the village without any trace of brilliancy at all. It was a grey, damp afternoon in mid-September, and she had tramped the whole muddy ten miles over from Killowny, carrying all her possessions in one skimpy bundle. The grand silks, no longer property of hers, had remained in the green caravan. She was tired and hungry and wet, and her aspect did not suggest even the very dimmest of theatrical stars; yet her uppermost feeling was a sense of relief and escape rather than of disappointment and defeat. The fact simply was that Mrs. Perry, soon finding Ellen to be quite use-

less from a professional point of view;—'The girl's no more voice than a hedge-sparrer,' she said to her husband, 'and as for dancing, me old umbreller there'd make as good an offer at it,'—had taken steps to render her sojourn with the show unenjoyable, and, one might hope, brief. Sour looks and words, scanty fare, much tending of Mrs. Perry's fractious old mother and some turbulent grandchildren, continued refusal of any part whatever in the performance—these were all in the programme, and resolutely carried out. There were, moreover, many other inevitable hardships and roughnesses in the life, unforeseen by Ellen. Sometimes, especially when they halted near the larger towns, uproarious unruly audiences appeared, and there was much drinking and quarrelling, which struck her with dismay. The Perrys took care that she should be nothing worse than frightened, but frightened very thoroughly she was. After one of these occurrences Mrs. Perry had observed complacently to her husband, 'She'll be runnin' home like a scared rabbit the next time we come within a walk of it, you'll see'; and the event had now justified the prediction.

For, on the night foregoing, an unusually violent row had arisen over a pipe-smoking competition, which was one of the attractions at Killowny, and in the tremors of her terror Ellen had expressed to her well-pleased hostess a wish to tarry no longer with the caravan. So far Mrs. Perry was all affability. But when Ellen had begun to say something about packing up the dresses, of which Mr. Perry's singing niece had had the loan for some

time past, there had ensued such a stormy denunciation of 'outrageous maneness' and 'thankless impidence,' that she was glad to flee from it almost empty-handed. After all, she reflected, what great use were they ever likely to be to her? As for the stage, her nearer view had made it look ugly and grotesque, as oblique light will caricature a powdered face. There was really no tincture of the sour grape in her readiness to turn her back upon it.

As she plodded along the tedious lonely road she felt with intense relief that every step was bringing her nearer home; the old familiar house, with its quiet brown-shadowed room, where she had fretted through so many discontented hours, seemed to her a haven of refuge, soothing and refreshing, after those glaring summer days in the hot, noisy, overcrowded caravan. She was so very glad to return that her happiness preoccupied her, and left her little leisure for wondering what sort of reception she might be likely to meet with. Indeed she took it for granted that her grandfather and father and Uncle Nicholas would be pleased, in their grumpy sort of way, to have her back; and if they were a bit cross, why, she was well used to them. When Clonfaragh chapel came in sight she began to feel a little anxious lest she should be looking what she called 'a quare old show intirely' after her long tramp through gusty showers. For as she heard the five-o'clock bell ringing she knew that she might expect to meet Con Neligan going his rounds. And, sure enough, at the next turn appeared a figure with postman's cap and bag. But, too sure, this proved to be not Con at all, but only Paddy Dermody.

'And so you're carryin' the letters, Paddy?' she said, with smiling uneasiness.

'Bedad am I,' replied Paddy. Any other boy in the place would have explained, but Paddy was a laconic youth, and Ellen had to ask, 'And why's that?'

'Sure, isn't Dan Molloy after gettin' the sack for dhrink, and he in it only a week!' Paddy answered.

'*Dan Molloy?* And what's gone wid Con Neligan, then?' said Ellen.

''Listed,' said Paddy, 'a while ago.' And he walked on whistling.

Ellen also resumed her way, feeling that a blank had fallen upon her home-coming. It now seemed to her rather a flat and dreary affair. She thought she would probably find the house empty, and the others all out fishing; but when she turned down their *boreen* she saw three or four children playing about, and two women standing in the doorway. One of these she recognised as the Widdy Loughlin. 'They've had her in washin' for them,' she supposed.

'Whethen now, and is it yourself, Ellen Ahern?' the Widdy said, with much surprise apparent and no pleasure at all. 'And what's bringin' you, in the land's name?'

'Sure it's long enough I'm away, Widdy Loughlin,' said Ellen. ''Tis about time I was comin' home.'

'Och, you needn't be widdyin' me,' she replied; and the other woman began to titter.

'Haven't you heard tell?' she said. 'Why, she and your father are after gettin' married last Sunday.'

Ellen could only stand and stare dumbly.

'And where are you come from at all this hour of the evenin'? 'Twould be dark before you had a cup of tay drunk,' said her stepmother. 'You weren't supposin' you could be stoppin' here? For we're hard put to it enough to find room for ourselves, let alone takin' in other people. Besides, your father's ragin', and small blame to him, at you thrapesin' off that way.'

'But what place else could I be goin' to?' said Ellen, 'and me walkin' the shoes off me feet the whole day to get home, and nothin' betther than the roadside at the end of it.'

'Och, well,' said the new Mrs. Ahern, 'we must wait till your father comes in, and see what he says to it.'

What he said was, in effect, that the girl might stop with them for a couple of days, just till she could find herself some sort of situation. For to service she must go. He wouldn't keep her a minute longer idling at home, to be running about the country and getting into mischief. And to this resolution he stood firm. The only opening that Ellen could hear of was a little place up at Caphill Farm, with one Mrs. Fahy, who had the name of being a mistress who expected incredible things of her 'general' girl. So thither Ellen reluctantly prepared to betake herself.

When she was collecting her few things on the day before her departure, she came upon the parcel containing the beautiful white dress, which she had stowed away in such a secure recess that nobody had meddled with it during her absence. She had distractedly forgotten its existence, and now that it

was recalled to her it seemed little to her purpose. She sat looking at it doubtfully for some time, and then, taking up the parcel, went out. Not that she had arrived at any conclusion, for she was still undecided whether she would convey it to Dr. Exham's house round the corner, or a long way farther to the wild bog-land beyond; she had made up her mind to do one or the other. It was not far from sunset, and dull grey weather, without a blink of brightness in the sky, except a narrow girdle and clasp of clear amber low in the west. Ellen went along slowly sauntering, and swiftly changing her mind. At one moment she was saying to herself that she 'd 'like to sling it into the ugly black hole it came out of, for it had brought her nothing, only bad luck'; the next that 'maybe she 'd a right to be bringin' it back to the young lady, who was after givin' it to her, so to spake, by accident.' Between these two arbitrarily chosen alternatives she wavered a long while, and it was no doubt mainly the nearness of the Exhams' gate that led her finally to adopt the latter.

She had intended just to leave the parcel at the front door, but to her disconcertion she met Mrs. Exham outside it, which made an explanation necessary. And Mrs. Exham would not hear of taking back the pretty white dress. 'It will make you a nice wedding-gown before very long, I dare say,' she said, laughing, as she turned away. So Ellen descended the steep little path, irresolute once more. She was too much cast down by the general aspect of her affairs to care greatly about details. All the world seemed unkind and estranged, and to-morrow she was to be at the bidding of cross-tempered old

Mrs. Fahy. She thought that her good days were done.

At the gate she stood still and looked aimlessly down the high-banked lane towards the scrap of shingle and sea and yellow western horizon in which it ended. And whom should she see, just stepping on to the beach out of Foxy Galpin's boat, but Con Neligan himself? He espied her at the same moment, and came running up to her. 'Musha good gracious! and is it yourself, Ellen?' he said. 'Why, I thought you 'd gone off play-actin' wid the ould Show.'

'Sure, I only went on a bit of a visit like to the Perrys,' said Ellen, 'and I came home last week. I wouldn't like the actin' at all: a body might as well be deminted as carryin' on that way. But I thought you was after 'listin'?'

'And so I was, bedad,' said Con. 'But when they got medically inspectin' of me, their ould rapscallion of a doctor ups and sez me sight wasn't good enough for them—the mischief sail away wid him! And the stupid ass he was, too. Stickin' up a bit of a card at me, wid letters and figures, and I dunno what on it, and biddin' me read it the lenth of the room off. "Give me a holt of it in me hand, sir," sez I, "till I can see rightly what 's on it and I 'll read it to you, fast enough." But not a fut of him would. So here I am.'

'Sure it 's well you 're out of it, if they 're that conthrary sort,' said Ellen.

'Well, now, very belike you 're right, Ellen,' said Con. 'And there 's them I 'd ha' been frettin' to lave behind me, if I 'd thought they was in Clon-

faragh. And I 'd be long sorry to go far away from it now. I 'm doubtin' I 've lost me chance of Mr. Archdall's place at Moylone; but I won't be long findin' another, no fear. Me sight 's good enough for these parts, anyhow.'

'Indeed, then, I should suppose you could see as well as e'er a man in the parish,' said Ellen.

'At all events I can see *you* finely, Ellen, astore,' said Con. 'And I never seen you lookin' betther, more betoken.'

'Och, Con, what talk you have!' Ellen protested. Yet it seemed to her that her good days might begin again, after all.

THE VENGEANCE OF JOE MAHONY

IF you wish to put Joe Mahony, the Ballyhoy carman, into a good humour with himself, you cannot do better than ask him to tell you how he drove Constable Gatchell over to Kiltaney Petty Sessions. You may venture upon the step safely enough, for the story is not a very long one, and Joe is always in such a hurry to relate his own part in it, that he never delays over preliminary events: These happened as follows:

It was a fine afternoon in harvest-time, when Peter Daly drove Mr. Blacker's bran-new reaping-machine out at the gate of the Big Long Corners, where the pale, tangled barley ears were lying low, on his way to the Little Long Corners, still glowed over with the ruddier gold of ripe wheat, which should fall next. He had to go only a short way, but unluckily it led by the entrance of Conroy the carpenter's shed, where Peter saw fit, ill-advisedly, to leave his horses standing, sleek and shiny, with the spick and span machine gleaming blue and scarlet behind them, while he went in and delivered a message, which got mixed up somehow interminably among several items of local gossip.

Now it chanced that little old Dan Byrne, the lame bill-sticker, with his paste-pot and a limp roll

containing advertisements of a sale of sixty cocks of prime hay off the meadow lands of Gortonagh, had just been at work on the opposite wall, whence he had torn down, among other things, a flaming yellow poster, descriptive of some bygone Port-brendan Races. This was left fluttering hither and thither in brief aimless flights at the capricious will of the passing breezes, which made waves in the grain-fields and eddies in the dust indiscriminately; and one of them presently whisked it across the road right under the nose of Charlie, the fidgety young roan. For some reason, best known to himself, the scrap of paper struck him as a portentous and terrific object, at which it was incumbent upon him to start with a sudden prance and clatter of hoofs, while his comrade, Major the chestnut, whose queer temper had not improved with the lapse of years, proved more than willing to take part in these demonstrations of alarm. So the next moment saw the pair bolting frantically off, and making, as ill-luck would have it, for the main thoroughfare of Ballyhoy. Peter Daly, warned by the noise outside, returning hurriedly to resume his neglected charge, arrived just in time to behold it disappear over the brow of the station-hill, at the fullest speed that could be got up in so short a space, and with no hopeful prospect of any check to its wild career.

Poor Peter is never a man of much resource or presence of mind, and at this crisis nothing more to the purpose occurred to him than to stand staring aghast, and ejaculate—'Murtheran-ages, and the masther afther payin' M'Kenzie's bill for it only yisterday—only yisterday, and pounds untould.'

Upon which his friend Joe Conroy remarked consolingly—'And, bedad, it's pounds untoulder he'll be apt to be payin' afore he's done wid it now. 'Twill be a quare thing if yourself's not sacked over it, Pether, anyway; and it'll be much quarer if there isn't half-a-dozen people kilt, let alone the horses, wid them manner of onnathural rapin' hooks slashing wild about the road.'

The onset, indeed, of an ancient scythed chariot could scarcely have been more peril-fraught than was the approach of poor Mr. Blacker's patent improved Victor-Columbia, as it came swaying and swerving along at a hand gallop, with its cruel-looking complexity of blades all fixed and revolving hungrily. By an extraordinary series of hairbreadth escapes, however, it ran amuck through the heart of the village without so much perdition as a chicken betiding the inhabitants; and thence it rushed on down Massey's lane, whirling and whirring and flashing like some monstrous mailed insect between the close green hedgerows. Here, too, good luck, if not good guidance, warded off many seemingly imminent casualties. A flurried cyclist congratulated himself—until he began to count his punctures—upon having had barely time to drop with his favourite pneumatic into a thorny ditch. The Widdy Grehan, who is, her neighbours say, 'all the ould ages you can think of,' scaled a barbed wire fence with all the agility of sixteen. And the Armstrongs unceremoniously turned their croydon in at the gate of the Hunters, their most intimate enemies.

But this chapter of accidents that did not happen could not be expected to prolong itself indefinitely,

and as the horses' pace was becoming madder and the lane narrower there is little doubt that some serious disasters were averted when Joe Mahony, the carman, boldly putting himself in their way, seized their distracted heads, and dexterously turned them down the cart track leading into Hart's turnip field, whereupon they came meekly to a stand, as if relieved by release from the dominion of their own tyrannous panic and by a sense of being once again under rational control. Joe's action had undeniably shown enough pluck and presence of mind to justify him in feeling that he had played the part of a good citizen, and deserved well of the community. So he was, naturally, all the more taken aback when a minute afterwards, while he still stood talking reassuringly to Major and Charlie, Constable Gatchell stepped over a neighbouring stile, and approaching him with a stern countenance, said grimly—

'Look you here, Mahony, this won't do be any manner of manes. I arrest you on a charge of furious dhrivin'.'

'What at all the mischief are you talkin' about?' Joe said, glaring at him across Major's drooping neck.

'Oh, right well you know what I'm talkin' about,' asserted Constable Gatchell, who was newly come to Ballyhoy, or he could not have made so ignorant a blunder; 'you needn't trouble yourself to be lettin' on. Amn't I just after seein' that consarn tatterin' along the lane, and I crossin' the field? At twinty mile an hour good it was goin', fit to wreck all before it. You might very aisy ha' slaughtered half the parish.'

'Well to goodness—me sowl to the saints. And

is it meself you was after seein' tatterin' along wid it? You've the face on you to be sayin' that? Troth and bedad it's the won'erful sight you've got intirely. And me wid me own car waitin' there under the trees, and the lad mindin' it, till I dhrive Dr. Wilson home when he's ped his visits. Is it twinty mile an hour I'll be takin' him, should you suppose? So it's arresting me you'd be? Faith now, I'm surprised,' Joe said commiseratingly, 'to hear you blatherin' that ridic'lous; but I only hope I'll be gettin' me health till *you* hear the last of it, me hayro, I do so.'

Of course Joe had not the slightest difficulty, under the circumstances, in proving his case, and the mistake was rectified in a very few minutes. But none the less Joe's resentment at the affront put upon him was deep and enduring. Ardent was his thirst for a chance of being 'even wid that big bosthoon'; and he may himself relate, as he loves to do, what a grand opportunity he found for taking his revenge. Seldom do the fates deal out such poetical justice.

'Is it how I dhruv Constable Gatchell? Sure, now, it might be a couple of months after the time he up and gev me impidence about stoppin' Mr. Blacker's yoke, and a cowld, wet, windy mornin' morebetoken it was, and the Petty Sessions day at Kiltaney. So a message comes to me from the barracks that me car was wantin' for to take a party over there at 10 o'clock sharp. Howsome'er a good quarter of an hour they kep' me waitin' at the door afore they had themselves ready; and who was it at all but me gintleman Constable Gatchell and Con-

stable Byrne—that 's a dacint lad—and they in charge of an imp of a lost child that had been got sthrayin' on the sthrand, and the magisthrates was to settle what to do wid it. Three or four year ould the spalpeen was, wid the wits half frightened out of its misfortnit head, and too little to be walkin' a matther of five mile, and too big to be carryin'; so that was the raison of the car.

'Well and good, off we set, with the young constable and the spalpeen on the one side, and Constable Gatchell—his Honour's glory—on the other, in the pours of rain. And we just throtted on steady, till we come to the bit of hill at Cloughlavin Church, and then the mare tuk to walk aisy. And with that Constable Gatchell he up and sez, sarcastic: "Might I throuble to ax whose funeral we was followin'?"

'So sez I to myself, "Och thin, it 's a hurry you 're in, me boyo. Maybe it 's *dhrivin' furious* you 'd have me be." And prisently after that sure the mare came to a standstill altogether.

'"What the divil and everythin' else are you at?" sez he. "You 'll be havin' us late, if you don't look out and hurry up a bit, for we 'd a right to get over agin eleven?"

'"Don't you wish you may?" sez I in my mind. And sez I to him, politeful—"Musha, it 's more sinse th' ould crathur has in her head than to be desthroyin' herself thravellin', when she 's after pickin' up a stone in her near hind fut?"

"'Sorra the sign of a one I see in it then," sez he, squinting over.

'"Sure," sez I, "it 's a little, tiny splinther of a

one, and thim 's the worst kind, and the throublesomest to be gittin' out."

'And, bedad, foostherin' at it I was for the best part of ten minyits, and had him ragin'. But I give you me word, we hadn't gone on above a couple of perches when she picked up another just the same sort, you persaive, and ne'er a hap'orth aisier to catch a hold of. Fit to lep out of his skin he was, let alone his ould police cape, that was flappin' up round his ears all the while, like the sails of a mill in the win', and he swearin' away in the middle of it every time he got a chance. And sure swear he might, and lep he might, for any differ it made to me or the ould mare.

'Let me see, now, what was the next thing happint us? Ay, tubbe sure. I noticed the straddle-band lookin' uncommon quare and wake, and ne'er a bit of sthrong cord we had among us—except some in me pocket that sted there—to be tyin' it up wid, so I had to run back to Nolan's to borry the loan of a sthring. And thin, dhrivin' over Basken Bridge, if me whip didn't fly out of me hand accidental, whin I thought to be stirrin' up the ould baste, and into the river, delayin' us again. Bejabers, I wish I had a pinny for ivery oath he had out of him that time; and it blowin' owdacious and rainin' polthogues.

'As well as I remimber, after that there was somethin' wint wrong wid one of the fut-boords that set him ragin', like one deminted. But the sheep in Saltragh lane was the greatest obstruction at all. For, you see, it was fair day, and ivery dhrove of them we met, down I 'd jump and catch a hould of poor Rose's head to purvint her of shying at them,

and slingin' us all in the ditch. Rael conthrary it 'ud ha' been of her to go do such a thrick on us, considherin' all the while I 've known her, man and boy, she 'd niver ha' passed a remark if she 'd met a flock of hippographs and mad buffalo bulls, or any other outragious crathur you could give a name to. Howane'er, that 's what I done, precautious. And, after that again, I wint a quarter of a mile out of our way round be Dycer's, for 'fraid she might take the notion, for once in her life, to be scared at the thrains.

'So what wid one thing and another, goin' on for twelve o'clock it was agin we landed up to the coort-house at Kiltaney, wid no less than the Disthrict Inspector himself stravadin' about in the wet outside, lookin' as bitther as if his gould watch was burnin' a houle in the palm of his hand, and awantin' to know what kep' us till that hour.

'"Well, glory be to goodness, sir," sez I to him, "if the constables was a thrifle late startin' from the barracks, it stands to raison the best plan was for me to be dhrivin' furious, the same way I dhruv Mr. Blacker's raper a while ago. So that 's what I done, and what betther could I do?" An', sure, sorra a lie I tould,' Joe says, coming with an ecstatic chuckle to the point of his story, 'for dhruv furious the big bosthoon was, and that 's a fac'.'

AT AN OPENING DOOR

DAN CONROY fell out with Katty, his sister, soon after breakfast one bright autumn morning. Now, a quarrel between these two was rare enough to be something of an event, circumstances having helped to make them very constant allies, for their mother had died a dozen years before, and their father, who promptly married again, choosing a widow with children of her own, had himself gone a few winters later. Since then the second Mrs. Conroy, with Katty and Dan and a herd of their small half- and step-brethren, had struggled on together in one little roadside cabin, a white knot on a tangled thread of winding green lanes.

Things being so, the brother and sister speedily acquired a habit of standing up for one another through thick and thin, in a household whose head, although not unkindly disposed toward them, had naturally other interests more at heart. And by virtue of that unsigned league they held their own fairly well, especially when Dan grew of a size to swell the weekly revenue with a shilling or so. But union remained always indispensable; they could not afford more than a passing tiff.

This morning, however, Dan had been 'put past his patience' altogether. The fact was that a casual

remark made by Peter Moore, their father's old friend, who looked in to pass the time of day, had brought to light a serious delinquency on Katty's part. Some weeks before, when Peter had left word with her that Mr. Cleary of the shop at Dunscreagh was in want of a handy boy, and that Dan should call there at once to see about the situation, as Peter had spoken for him, she had neglected to deliver the message, with the result that the vacancy had now been filled by Peter's cousin Andy.

This tantalising sequel was the first Dan ever heard of the matter, and the place would have suited him, he thought, exactly. Long had he been eager for such a chance. For Dan was quick-witted and ambitious, and quite confident that he would splendidly better his lot, if once he got where he could turn to account his clear handwriting and readiness at figures. Here at Kiltaney only odd jobs of rough field-work were to be had.

Moreover he was weary, with a hot impatience, of the little nook which had been all the world to him for seventeen long years ; where he seemed hemmed in on a road leading aimlessly round and round one small dreary plot, and never bringing you any 'forwarder' ; whither the monotonous days came marked, if marked at all, merely by shrewder pinches of hunger and cold, or the painful bereavement of illness.

Once he had grumbled about this sameness to old Jimmy Shanessy, who replied, 'Ah, sure, lad, I wouldn't say things was any the worse for bein' all of a piece any more than me ould coateen here 'ud be the worse of not havin' such a power of patches

on it—let alone holes.' And although Dan had no argument immediately forthcoming, he felt and resented the false analogy. But now, when a door was opening upon a brighter prospect—all the possibilities of Dunscreagh, with congenial work and regular wages—that it should have been slammed in his face, or, rather, surreptitiously shoved to behind his back, seemed to him intolerable. No wonder that he was enraged, and bitterly accused Katty of having done it 'accidental on purpose.'

There was truth enough in the charge, although he flung it out in random wrath, to make Katty repel it vehemently. She had indeed tried hard really to forget Peter's message, but with as little success as if she attempted to rub the pattern off a tarnished brass. Was it her fault that it had continued to stand out on her memory with most obtrusive distinctness?

Less clear were her mixed motives for wishing to keep Dan from Dunscreagh. It was partly, perhaps chiefly, that she dreaded his absence. Though Dunscreagh was not many miles distant, 'you would be half the day coming and going,' and she knew well how seldom she would get a sight of him once he was established there.

Partly, too, she may have been prejudiced by her own experience of new scenes; for she had gone last spring to learn dressmaking with her cousin, no farther off than the next parish, and had returned in a few weeks invalided by homesickness and a bad cough, which still hung about her, to her neighbours' conviction that she was 'going in a decline, the same way as her poor mother.'

But after all, what had turned the scale was, it must be feared, the consideration of the sixpence which Dan's travelling expenses would have absorbed, and which she wanted to lay out upon some small gewgaw for her own wear, a love of finery being another ailment contracted abroad. Her guilty feeling about this piece of short-sighted selfishness urged her to belittle its consequences, and goaded her into acrimonious speeches.

'Much Mr. Cleary would ha' took you if you 'd went to him that scandalous figure, wid the two elbows of you stickin' through your sleeves like the small ends of a couple of red mangolds. He might as well be hirin' an ould scarecrow out of the fields to come and sit cocked up behind his counter, frightenin' off the people on him! Sure, it 's a show you are! Apter he 'd be to give you a trial if you sted away.'

'And bedad, then, it 's yourself done your endeavours to keep me out of it,' Dan rejoined; 'but maybe you 'll live to repent it before you 're a great dale older, Miss Katty Conroy!'

With this menacing prediction the interview had to end, lest Dan should lose the eleven o'clock train from Ballyhoy. For his employer was sending him on a rare expedition into Dublin city.

It was through brilliant late autumn sunshine that he started on his long half-hour's trudge down the quiet lanes, the nature of his errand compelling him to carry one of Farmer Byrne's heavy horse-collars round his neck, with a complexity of straps dangling about him. These made him at first sight a somewhat intricately puzzling object, a fact of which he was disagreeably conscious.

The tall hedgerows on either hand were still thickly green, but the crisp leaves of the larger trees bestrewed the rustling foot-path. As the brisk breeze came and went, it set them scampering in brief rushes, like flocks of brown mice. In the shorn fields glimpsing through bars and gaps the golden gleam had not yet quite faded from the stubble. Threshing-machines were busy among the richlier-hued ricks; now and then he passed within ear-shot of one, and heard its humming drone sharpen its querulous note ever and anon, fitfully and abruptly, as if at the thought of some fresh grievance.

Dan, however, gave scanty thought to such things, being engrossed by grievances of his own. The most pressing of them was his cumbrous burden, and that he temporarily laid down upon arriving at the saddler's.

By the time that his load was ready for him, the dusk had closed in, and the lamps were all lit—a fascinating spectacle of great luminous pearl globes, with diamond cores, and clustering golden stars that flung jewels of light into the dark water as it slid along by the slimy Quay-wall and beneath the bridges. Dan could not forbear some pauses for contemplation; and he reached the big railway terminus just at the moment when the last crimson flash of one of the infrequent Ballyhoy trains was vanishing into the darkness at the far-off end of the platform.

He had consequently a full hour to wait upon it, with no better resources for passing the time than a couple of spare coppers. One of them speedily went to secure the largest bun that hungry researches

could discover upon the counter in the refreshment-room, and the other would have followed, had it not been for the rival charms of a book-stall, which allured hard by, strewn inches deep with all the freshest of printed pennyworths.

Its aspect proved irresistible, and soon fixed the destination of the second coin. Yet there stood Dan for a long time in doubt about his purchase, even after he had finished munching his inadequate bun.

It was not that he did not know his own mind so far as his own personal tastes were concerned. To gratify them he would have possessed himself without hesitation of the *Comical Codgers*, whose familiar pink and violet covers his sharp eyes recognised covetously among the parti-coloured litter, which he was scanning from a respectful distance.

But the question was not so simple, being complicated by considerations about the likings of a person whom he found it impossible to disregard, even though they were, as it happened, at that moment 'black out with each other.' Perhaps, indeed, this exceptional circumstance told against *Comical Codgers*, since it struck Dan that to bring Katty home something that would please her would give him obviously a favourable opportunity for making up.

Dan's temper was far from implacable, and he had already begun to say to himself, 'Sure, she didn't do it on purpose, the crathur. Some people's memories is no better than an ould sieve wid the bottom out.'

But he could not disguise from himself the regrettable fact that what Katty would like best was the

rubbishy little weekly fashion-paper—*Clementina's Repository of Dress and Fashion*—of which she had brought back with her some odd numbers from her dressmaking cousin, and which she still wistfully studied. He had seen it too often lying on the dresser to imagine that he did not remember its odious name; and his knowledge that she would probably have asked him to bring her one, had they been on speaking terms when they separated, seemed to put him somehow under a debt of honour.

Back again, at the little Ballyhoy station, there were no vivid electric lamps, and only a few lack-lustre glimmers of the daylight waning away through the colourless drizzle. Homeward along the wet lanes, the dead leaves, which had scurried about so briskly in the sunny morning breeze, now lay very still, too limp and sodden to crawl. As he tramped over them, Dan's mood likewise was less strenuous and more cast down than in the forenoon.

Then his spirits had been to some degree kept up by the stimulus of his indignation against Katty, but now that he had a peace-offering in his pocket this failed, and they flagged, despondency superseding resentment. He said to himself that he had 'ne'er a chance of doing anything in such a little ould rat-hole of a place; and ne'er a chance of getting out of it; so the long and the short of it was that he had ne'er a chance at all.'

The conclusion seemed pitilessly logical, and he arrived at it just as he came to a point where somebody descried his approach, through the dimness, not without anxiety. Katty was watching for him at the turn of the road a few yards from their door,

and wondering whether they were still to be 'out.' She hoped not, and considered it rather lucky that she had a small piece of news to tell him, which offered a handy end whereby to pick up a fresh thread of conversation.

And when Dan recognised her he said, 'Musha, good gracious, and is it yourself? Bedad now, but you're the great fool to be standin' out there under the teems of rain, gettin' your death!'

So Katty perceived that they had fallen in again. She replied: 'Sorra a death; sure it's only mistin' a wee drop of an odd while. And there's a furrin sort of a letter after comin' for you. But sittin' inside on the table I left it, for 'fraid 'twould be drownded wid the wet.'

'Whethen now is there?' Dan said, with some interest, for rare were the postman's official calls upon the Conroy household. The little flicker of a chance so cheered him that as they splashed on to their door, he drew 'Clementina' from his pocket and handed it to Katty, saying jocosely: 'And here's a letter come for you, and a fine sizable one more betoken.'

Katty stopped to examine it on the threshold, where the farthest flakes of the firelight touched her hands and her head, with the dark hair all in a silvery mist of tiny rain-drops. 'I do declare, it's the fashion-book,' she said gleefully, a very large pennyworth of pleasure brightening her grey eyes, 'and there's a whole page in it of the loveliest hats ever you beheld.'

But Dan was rapidly getting out of his harness, that he might go in quest of his letter, which lay a

white fleck on the smoke-grimed deal table, its 'furrin' origin betrayed by the benevolent-looking blue gentleman whose head occupied the place of the more usual lilac queen.

'From me Uncle Peter in New Jersey it's bound to be,' Dan said; and from Uncle Peter it was. Never hitherto had his correspondence been of much interest or import; but to-night, as in the quietest corner of the noisy room Dan spelled out the sentences by the flickering firelight, he felt as if another door had suddenly opened before him, letting in a vast sea- and landscape, and the waft of a mighty wind almost taking his breath. For his uncle wrote inviting him to cross the Atlantic, and offering to furnish the means.

'You would easy get a place,' the letter said, 'in one of the stores down at Collinsville, a new town they are running up a bit west. All my own boys are out doing for themselves, and John, that is but fifteen, draws his five dollars a week as regular as the sun sets on Saturday night. So write me word when you are coming, and I will mail you the order for your passage-money. But don't be putting it off too long, unless you have a mind to stop where you are for good and all. It's a pity to be wasting your time starving and idling, and there's no chance for anybody in poor old Kiltaney.'

For a moment Dan felt half scared. There was something hardly canny in this echo of his own sentiments sounding from afar overseas. But as the new prospect grew brighter and clearer before him like a most rapid dawn, fear and doubt melted away mistily. That wind from the west

was as full of glamour as the air of a spring day in autumn.

Dan emerged from his corner with flashing eyes, and told his news in a quiver of excitement. Of course everybody shared in it to some extent. His stepmother, always hopefully happy-go-lucky, was so much interested that she let the stirabout burn, and only its ominous odour recalled her from the fair-promising future to a present which threatened an uneatable supper.

The children were clamorous with their own views of the situation, from Paddy, who wanted to accompany him, to little Lizzie, who, as a preliminary, inquired, 'What sort of bastes lived out in the fields there?' To whom Dan replied instructively, 'Most superior.'

Amid so full a chorus, Dan might readily overlook the fact that Katty took but a small part in it, unenthusiastically. Nevertheless, it did strike him as rather unfeeling conduct when, in a few minutes, she withdrew from the discussion, which was still animated, and sat down by the fire, with *Clementina's Repository* on her knee.

His own happiness, however, made him sympathetic, and anxious to show a friendly interest in other people's pursuits, which it is often easier to do from a height than on a level. Therefore he by and by approached Katty, and hazarded a comment upon the pages in which she was seemingly engrossed.

'That's illigant, bedad,' he said, with already an unintentional touch of patronage in his tone, as he pointed to a fantastic blouse. 'But I wouldn't say

but I might like it better only for the quare cock-ups on the two shoulders of it.'

'It isn't too bad,' Katty remarked, with a meek indifference, quite unlike her wonted demeanour.

'I'll be lookin' out a one like it for you in the States,' said Dan. 'There 's apt to be plenty of dacint shops in it. Musha! isn't it the good job, after all, that I didn't go to Dunscreagh?'

The garment referred to was really rather ingeniously grotesque, but the shapes into which it swam as she stared at it were flagrant caricatures. 'Thank'y kindly, Dan,' in the same apathetic tone, was all she replied.

'Is it another cold you've got?' Dan inquired, after a hurried speculation about the cause of her languor.

But she said, 'Sure not at all,' and began to flutter over the leaves in search of something, with a show of great preoccupation, which impressed him with the belief that she was 'just entirely took up wid the ould rags.'

At the ensuing supper Katty's silence continued, and she ate as little as she talked. Certainly the badly burned stirabout was unpalatable enough to account for a small appetite, and soon—though not before Dan's route had been fixed, and the children were squabbling about the presents he should bring them from America—she got up, saying that she would open the house-door, 'to get shut of the ugly smell of it, that would stifle the fish in the sea.'

Since she and Dan had come in, the east wind had risen and swirled away the thicker rain-clouds from about a blurred white moon and a few wraiths of

stars. It blew bitterly in at the Conroys' door, yet Katty was still standing there in the full sweep of it, when, some minutes afterward, Dan came, too and looked out over her shoulder.

'Finely the night's cleared up,' he said, his newly acquired complacency taking the widest range. 'Look at them stars comin' out as plain as print!'

But Katty said, 'The ould States is a terrible dale further than Dunscreagh, and I can't purvint you of goin' off to *thim* at all.'

It was no doubt an inconsequent reply, yet that cannot have been what made it so startling to Dan. Nor did he himself understand the reason.

'Then you done it on purpose,' he said, looking hard at her; 'you done it on purpose, and why did you?' And for a moment it seemed likely that his next words or thoughts would put between them half this world's width, or perhaps a greater distance.

But all at once as he saw the small, forlorn figure standing in the doorway, with the black night waiting behind her, and the ghostly white moon-face watching her, something told him why; and something else, akin to terror and pity, although maybe only an humble relation, caught him by the heart so that he suddenly went on speaking, after a scarcely perceptible pause, and in a merely matter-of-fact manner, 'When I have the money saved for the two of us to be comin' along, we'll be goin'. What talk was there of any sooner?'

'Glory be to goodness!' said Katty, facing him with eyes shining much brighter than the mist-entangled stars. 'But is it the truth you're tellin' me?'

'Is the sky over your head?' Dan said curtly.

'Glory be to the great goodness!' Katty said again. 'I was thinkin' you'd be off maybe next week—but 'twas only the childer talkin' foolish. But every penny I'll put by if you 'll stop wid me; and I'll get Paddy the Higgler to take back me new yella brooch—I will so,' she said, with a remorseful recollection of the schemed-for sixpence that had purchased it. 'And I might sell him me ring wid the red stones—I might, for I'm torminted these times tyin' it on wid a string. And if I could be chance get a job of sewin'—'

'Katty, Katty!' their stepmother called in exasperated accents from the fireside, 'come in out of perishin' yourself there, and keepin' the door open wid the win' fit to blow us all to the other end of the world!'

'Sorra a much!' said Dan.

But his sister with a quick movement thrust out the wide-sighing night, and shut themselves into a little smoky house, whose familiar domestic sounds of shrill children and clattering crockery seemed to swell louder for the exclusion.

'Come along in, Dan,' she said. 'I was as plased as anythin' all the while about the letter. Only I 'm glad you're not goin'; and I mightn't be delayin' you any great while. We 'll get it saved up some time, soon enough. Sure we 'll do grand!'

'Ay, to be sure, grand,' said Dan.

Nevertheless when they reëntered the room, and he again saw his letter lying, a rather conspicuous object, on the table, he hastened to hide it away in a nook behind the big pink-rimmed bowl—away out of his sight.

COCKY'S CONSCIENCE

THE acquaintances of Cocky M'Cann often remarked that he had no shame in him, a statement which was not fully borne out by facts; for though Cocky might indeed with truth be called 'as brazen as brass' on most points, and towards most people, there were some few in relation whereto he was really capable of feeling abashed. If, for example, he found himself on any occasion convicted of lacking that knowledge of the world and experience of life which he had enjoyed nearly seven years' opportunities for acquiring, confusion visibly covered him, from the fringe of black locks cut straight above his troubled grey eyes to the bare feet shifting uneasily, as though impatient to flee the scene of his discomfiture. And when it happened to take place in the presence of anybody whom he esteemed a superior person, such confusion was naturally all the worse confounded. Now, the strictly limited number of these persons included his father, the elder Bernard M'Cann. It is to be feared that this was not caused by any recognition on Cocky's part of his duty towards his parents, whom he felt himself quite at liberty to despise. He had, in fact, long since formed a very humble opinion of his admiring mother's capacity. Rather it may be taken as an ex-

emplification of the principle that familiarity breeds contempt, as Bernard M'Cann was a sailor, and during much the greater portion of Cocky's existence had been seafaring in distant climes. His returns thence with marvellous odds and ends of foreign produce, which he, more marvellously still, seemed to regard as careless trifles, had marked the chief epochs in Cocky's history, and had impressed upon him the belief that nobody else in the parish of Ballylogan owned 'so rare a wondered father and a wise.' The tenet led him to vaunt himself with supercilious insolence over all his contemporaries in public, exhibiting his curios with the best possible imitation of his father's matter-of-course, off-hand manner, joined to an outspoken disparagement of his audience —which was his own fancy. But in private he entertained a profound respect for this voyager on strange seas, and would have been most loth to betray any ignorance before him.

Therefore, it was with no small mortification that, shortly after one of his father's homecomings, Cocky became aware of having landed himself in a tight place. It was by reason of a little white hen, whom he called his Toppy, and identified with a cherished favourite lost to him lately through his own headstrong misconduct. But all the while she was an innocent pretender, foisted upon him by a stratagem, the history of which is, no doubt, familiar to some of our readers.[1] So successful was its result that Cocky transferred to her all, and more than all, the affections he had concentrated upon the real Toppy, and with them, of course, their accompanying

[1] 'From the East unto the West,' p. 231.

anxieties and cares. His solicitude about her was such that when, somewhat against his wishes, she had been provided with a clutch of eggs to hatch, he kept a resentful and unquiet eye upon her calm sittings, apprehensive lest the task should prove injurious or irksome to her. At length his impatience for her release from the dark little shed under whose low-browed, sodded roof he could frequent her company only in cramped and uncomfortable attitudes, prompted him to take, with a view to expediting matters, a step daring and irrevocable, which he reconsidered, too late, uneasily enough. His reflections grew more harassing as the critical twenty-first day approached and passed, and not a shell was chipped, 'nor a sign of it on them, no more than if they were a handful of smooth stones off the strand,' as Mrs. M'Cann reported after investigation. What alarmed him most was the probability that a more searching scrutiny might presently end in pointing him out as the cause of the failure, and, at the same time, as the perpetrator of something ridiculous—something at which his father would laugh and chuckle. His fears waxed acute when he heard his mother say that 'she 'd wait a couple more days, and then break a one of the eggs, to see was it addled they were, for there 'd be no use keepin' the crathur on them any longer.' To her surprise, Cocky, whom she had expected to please thereby, resisted this proposal bitterly, declaring with much grimness that 'he'd like to find anybody smashin' up *his* eggs, and Toppy after wastin' her time sittin' on them half the year.' However, she set it down as merely a piece of the contrariness which she was

well used to encountering in her only and badly-spoiled child.

But Cocky, in his hobble, had a strong wish to get his father's opinion upon the case. He could not, of course, attempt to obtain it by any dangerous straightforward questions; so he bided his time until he saw Bernard establish himself to smoke an afternoon pipe on the rough stone seat alongside their door, beneath a window where stalky geranium leaves pressed hard against the pane. Then he strolled up in a casual way, and, having artfully introduced the subject of poultry, proceeded to relate the following ingeniously-constructed anecdote:

'One time I heard tell of a boy owned a hin— I mane it was a girl she was all the while, a little girl—and her mother was after puttin' some eggs under the hin—or maybe it was an ould grandmother they had in it; bedad, now, I think it was. Anyway, she was an ould black hin, wid ne'er a white feather on her, nor a top-knot aither. So she was a great while sittin', and the boy thought he might as well thry could he hurry her up a bit—the *girl*, tubbe sure I mane; Lizzie Kilkelly her name was——'

'What talk have you about Lizzie Kilkelly?' said his father, who had hitherto bestowed more attention upon the faint quiver of flame in the pipe-bowl than upon his son's discourse.

'I was tellin' you what she done wid the eggs her ould big black hin had hatchin'. It was one day her mother, or grandmother, was wint out, I dunno after what; it couldn't ha' been the pig's milk, for they didn't own e'er a pig at all. So the girl consaited that very belike the hate had a

right to help the chuckens comin' out, and she tuk an' she slipped the eggs just for a couple of minyits into the scaldin' wather there was boilin' in the kettle, to thry would it hurry them up at all —that 's what the girl done.'

'And she must have been a born fool to go do any such a thing,' remarked Bernard M'Cann; 'or as mad as a March hare.'

'So she was,' Cocky said composedly, 'ravin'.'

He strolled away again with much apparent unconcern, but, in reality, his father's comment was a serious blow to him, and his darkest forebodings were strengthened by it. During the rest of that day he was constantly expecting his mother to try her experiment upon the eggs, and he felt sure that *his* experiment would then somehow be found out; and he had ascertained that the person whose opinion he most valued would consider him a fool or a lunatic. He went to bed in a gloomy frame of mind.

The next morning was among the last of April's, and had accordingly a sort of license to deal in variable weather. But the showers which it produced at fitfully frequent intervals were by no means of the sportive, sunshiny type appropriate to the season. They came driving down, cold and fierce, on wild flurries of wind, hunting everybody who would fain wear a dry skin to seek precipitate shelter underneath dripping thatch, or on the lee-side of walls, and stacks, and dykes. In the course of one of the most violent *polthogues* the M'Canns' kitchen was abruptly invaded by a youngish matron who burst in on Cocky and his

mother like one hotly pursued, carrying a small child and a capacious market-basket, both of which she had been trying to protect with an inadequate plaid shawl.

'Saints above, Mrs. Morissy, and is it yourself?' Mrs. M'Cann said. 'Sure you're not after thrampin' over from Kilmacreagh this wild day, and wid the infant child? The teems is fit to drownd it.'

'Bedad am I,' said Mrs. Morissy, 'and on to Stakesbridge after that again. 'It's a hardship on the crathur, but sorra a sowl have I to lave her wid now she's grown too lively to be lavin' wid herself. She's better off drowndin' than crawlin' into the fire like a cricket out of the pate-creel the way she would in half a minyit if she got me back turned. A rael caution she is for creepin' and crawlin', and she only goin' on for a twelvemonth. I was hopin' she might be a bit backward, for then they don't want that much mindin' to keep them off disthroyin' theirselves. But the talk she has out of her when she's in the humour would surprise you. There's nothin' she can't say if she likes—is there, Biddy?' But Biddy chose to make no display of her conversational gifts, and merely stared round this strange house with blue eyes of tragic depth and darkness.

She's a darlin' quiet child,' said Mrs. M'Cann. 'When my little boy here was that age he would be mimickin' the cocks and the pigs and meself; every noise he heard he made an offer at most extr'ornary. But, och, woman dear, put down your heavy basket out of your hand and sit in to the

fire till I get yous a sup of milk. I didn't know there was a fair in the town to-day.'

'Nor there isn't e'er a one,' said Mrs. Morissy. 'But I promised ould Mr. Noblett I 'd bring him the butter and eggs widout fail. It 's scarce enough the eggs is these times. I 'm a week gadrin' a couple of dozen, and they do be short of them for the shop. Sixpence a dozen is all the ould man allows me for the eggs, and the same for the pound of me butter—lovely fresh butter and eggs; it 's no price at all. But I 'd be afraid of me life to disappoint him, for you see, ma'am, he 's got an account agin us already long enough to paper your wall round wid, and it 's to him we 'll have to be lookin' for borryin' Jim's passage-money to Liverpool in June. If he can't git over to the harvest, I dunno what 's to become of us at all. So I thought I 'd do better to be steppin' along wid the basket, wet or dry.'

'Sure, now, you maybe might so,' said Mrs. M'Cann, 'but sit down anyway till it takes up. Your basket 's all right where it is, ma'am, behind the door. There 's not a drop comes in under it now ever since Himself made the grand little trinch over to the gripe for runnin' off the wather. He 's a terrible handy man about the place when he 's at home. You needn't be afeard of anythin' happ'nin' it.'

As far as danger from inundations went Mrs. M'Cann was justified in her confidence, and yet she gave her guest a very false feeling of security. Cocky withdrew from the apartment almost immediately after the visitor's arrival. His mother

said he was shy. In point of fact he was generally irked by the society of small children, unless they had sense enough to be tormented. He did pull several ugly faces at Miss Biddy Morissy, but for any effect they produced he might as well have made grimaces at the solemn eastern blue before sunrise. So he slipped away, and stood in the little passage with its door opening into the rain.

There his attention presently turned to Mrs. Morissy's big market-basket, which was set against the half-high partition wall, out of view from the room within. Naturally he poked up the loosely tied-down lid to observe its contents. 'Musha, good gracious,' he said to himself as they appeared, 'but she has a great power of eggs.' To this colourless reflection, however, succeeded another of a complexion quite different. The sudden thought occurred to him that it would be a grand thing if he could exchange some of those fine fresh eggs for Toppy's unlucky clutch, because then their parboiled condition would never be discovered, by any of his belongings at least, nor, consequently, would his piece of folly ever be brought home to him. It was Cocky's habit to execute with despatch his boldly-conceived designs, and before many moments elapsed he had staggered cautiously out, bearing the heavy basket, to Toppy's narrow shed. His operations there seemed to be supervised by some singularly handy good luck, as he accomplished the transfer of the eggs very rapidly, without any breakages, and had safely restored the basket to its former place, several minutes before Mrs. Morissy finished recounting the latest vicissitudes

of her life, and was ready to start again in a treacherous gleam of sunshine. Nothing did she surmise of any tampering with her wares.

On this occasion Cocky behaved so nicely, lifting the basket, and pushing back the packing-case gate for their visitor, that his mother was rapt in proud admiration of his polished manners. His amiability was simply due to his satisfaction at the trick he had played, but Mrs. M'Cann fondly took his unwonted courtesy for a sign that he proposed to be 'a rael good child intirely,' wherein she, too, was much mistaken, and promptly set to rights.

The temporary clearing up appeared to her a suitable opportunity for prosecuting her inquiry into the condition of Toppy's eggs, off which she therefore enticed that patient sitter to flop after a lure of potato parings. She was just tapping a warm egg warily on the edge of the metal dish that had held these, when a shrill shout of remonstrance startled her. Cocky had been swimming his cap in a large adjacent puddle, and pleasing himself with the thought that now he and Toppy might have a brood of little fluffety chickens after all, when he espied his mother's approach to the shed, and at once sped in hot haste to stay her proceedings. 'You've smashed it,' he howled, perceiving that he had come too late, 'you've smashed it on me, and I after biddin' you to let thim be.'

Mrs. M'Cann, however, was for the instant deafened by amazement at what she saw. 'Why, I declare to the great goodness,' she said, 'it looks to ha' been laid only this minyit of time. Saw you

ever the like? And she over three weeks sittin'—as fresh as anythin' it is.'

'Of coorse it is, and you've tuk and bruck it; the biggest one of thim all. Disthroyed the best of me chuckens—that's what you've done,' Cocky clamoured, kicking up in his fury large splashes of liquid mud against the front of the shed, out of which his mother was awkwardly backing.

'Och, thin, stop that, child dear,' she entreated him; 'you'll have me a mask of dirt—your father 'll hear you—and you're terrifyin' the hin.' Cocky upon this last consideration stopped short in the act of hurling a stray turf-sod with the mien of an angry monkey. 'But as for chuckens, what chance is there of e'er a one after all this while? Ne'er an atom of use it is to be keepin' her any longer on such unnathural ould eggs. But sure, sure honey, I won't be touching them at all.' She hastened to add, finding that she had touched unseen springs which set him dancing again like a belligerent ostrich, 'She has tin left yet, and that's plinty.' Cocky yelled: 'Plinty, is it?' and, jumping high, flung down the sod into the pigsty amid profuse spattering.

'I'll tell you what I'll do, doaty darlin',' she urged. 'If you'll be a good boy, and whisht, and not let your poor father see you behavin' yourself bold, I'll fry you the cracked egg for your dinner wid a taste of his fat bacon. It'll make a lovely bit of kitchen to your pitaties, and the little hin can be sittin' as long as you plase; I won't meddle or make wid her. There, jewel.'

Upon these terms peace was patched up. At

dinner-time Cocky enjoyed the fried egg with an injured air, and replied with aggrieved forbearance when his father joked about his luxurious meal. Later on he attempted to extort from his mother a further concession of pitaty-cake for his tea; but as she was out of buttermilk, he had to content himself with an unsatisfying bounty of sugar on his crust of bread.

The following fortnight was a somewhat uneventful one for Cocky. He spent a large part of it in keeping jealous watch and ward over Toppy, against whose continued sitting he was well aware that his mother had received much neighbourly advice, especially from the old Widow Goligher, the original proprietress, if he had but known, of the white, top-knotted bird, which he had been beguiled into accepting as his lost favourite. That circumstance now gave all the more unseemliness to the taunts and threats with which he assailed her one day when he had unfortunately overheard her recommending the removal of the clutch.

'You 'd take them away unbeknownst you wud, wud you, you ould tormint?' he said, popping up from behind the dandelion-studded bank to glare furiously at her, as she stood by her own door in converse with Mrs. M'Cann. 'Bedad, now, you 're the quare ould impident woman to be managin' other people's hins. What 's gone wrong wid your own little white one, I 'd like to know, that was as ugly as sin to Toppy? If it 's died she is on you, it 's my belief you starved the life out of her wid never feedin' her rightly at all, that 's what *you* done; and now if you don't keep your tongue off inter-

fering wid Toppy, that's no business of yours, I'll be very apt to let out your ould skinny pig there, and hunt him till he drops down.'

The Widdy might well reiterate that poor Mrs. M'Cann was to be pitied with him, the dacint woman. But she had neighbours who were even more pitiable.

One morning, soon after, Mrs. Morissy paid the M'Canns another visit. This time she brought neither baby nor basket, and had a story to tell, according to which the state of her affairs was truly commiserable. For she related in the first place how little Biddy was took bad, the crathur. The doctor couldn't rightly say what it was ailed her; some sort of wakeness like and she seemed to be just dwindlin' away, and their fine young cow was after dyin' on them, indeed yes. And then there had been terrible work about that last basket of eggs she'd brought into the shop. 'Sure, ma'am, the next time I looked in there, I found Mr. Noblett ragin' mad with me. For, sez he, the one half of them two dozen eggs was the most awful things he'd ever witnessed; and he had a couple kep to show me, and bedad I'd niver seen or smelt the aquil of them. I dunno what they were like at all. But divil aught amiss was there wid me own eggs I well know. So, sorra a pinny would I get for the good ones itself, and he bid me not to be bringin' butter or eggs or anythin' else next or nigh his place the longest day I'd live. 'Twas no fault of mine, that's certain, but it's on'y impidence and abuse I got when I passed a remark about them to the women I'd gad'red some of them from, bedad

did I.' Mrs. Morissy's insinuated suspicions had, indeed, made havoc of her amity with her neighbours, and had left her an estranged and resourceless woman. 'And now I 'm just after thrampin' over to Noblett's to thry would they be anyways more raisonable,' she continued, 'but not a bit of it. Bawlin' to me to quit he was, like as if he was scarin' crows. Afeard I was to so much as ax him for the thrifle of groats I wanted bad for the child, and the big tin full of them starin' at me off of the shelf fornint the counter. I 'm bothered what to say to it all.'

Mrs. M'Cann could say nothing more to the purpose than:—'Well, now, that was quare and conthrary, and that ould Noblett's an ould lad. I declare you might think there was some manner of *pishtrogues* put on the eggs this year, for they beat everythin'. But if I was you, ma'am, I 'd be apt to give the little crathur a spoonful of applemint tay. I heard tell not so long ago of a poor man was cured with it, that was bad with paliasses. Them herbs do be very lucky things sometimes.' So Mrs. Morissy by and by departed, faintly cheered, bearing this prescription in her mind, and in a quaint patterned mug a drop of new milk for Biddy.

Now Cocky had been present during her tale of woes, and as he listened to it, there had crept over him an unusual and uncomfortable feeling, which was nothing more nor less than self-reproach. He had always taken it for granted that the loss of the spoiled eggs would fall upon Mr. Noblett, whom nobody liked, and whom everybody called an ould naygur, so that to do him a bad turn might be con-

sidered rather praiseworthy than otherwise, not that Cocky was wont to concern himself greatly about the meritoriousness of his actions. The discovery of the misfortunes which his method of extricating himself from his embarrassment had incidentally drawn down upon the Morissys, came to him, therefore, with something of a shock, and set the seldom used machinery of his conscience going. It worked without much force, yet with a disagreeable amount of friction. He did not reach the point of wishing that he had not taken the eggs; but he did somehow wish that he had not made faces at the big-eyed baby.

Wishes of that sort are a weak relief for remorseful twinges, and these continued to molest him intermittently throughout the rest of the day, until towards bed-time a more efficacious remedy suggested itself. It occurred to him that when Toppy's chickens were hatched, he might present Mrs. Morissy with one of them. This would be a handsome reparation, he thought, as he knew that she would have had no more than sixpence for the dozen eggs, while he had heard his mother say that you would get as much as ninepence for a good chicken.

'Be the hokey I will so,' he said to himself as he began to fall asleep.

And as if to reward this virtuous resolve, on the very next morning he found that the chickens had come out. Ten of them there were, for not a single one had perished, or was even a laggard, and such splendid chuckens had never, of course, been seen in Ballylogan. They were, it must be admitted, a

mixed lot, all uniformly downy and pipy-voiced, but as to size and colour and shape varying in degrees which became more perceptible day by day. Cocky's joy in them was extreme, and the sole inevitable drop of bitterness that mingled with it came from the thought that one of the lovely brood must go as a gift to Kilmacreagh. He spent a good deal of his leisure in choosing 'Mrs. Morissy's chucken,' and the task seemed to get only more difficult as time went on. For a while he had almost fixed upon a black one, because he had three of that hue; but they all throve so grandly that he had to abandon the idea. Then a little white one that had got its eye hurt seemed an appropriate offering, until its eye was cured, and he fancied he saw signs of an incipient top-knot, which again altered his views. Later on an ungainly, long-legged, specklety bird, which walked over its brethren with enormous feet, promised to be the least precious of the brood; but it grew so very tame and cute, and developed such an engaging way of galloping to meet him whenever he came near, that he felt himself really quite unable to face the prospect of a parting. Moreover, as he often reflected, he would have only *nine* chuckens left, and somehow or other—he could not have given any definite reason—still he certainly did especially wish to have *ten*. The matter worried him not a little, nor could he see any way of shaking off the self-imposed obligation. But at last a new light flashed upon him.

It was a softly fading pink June sunset, and Cocky, leaning half dreamily against the door of

the pigsty, had not been thinking particularly about the chickens or anything else, when all at once he stood up straight with a gleam of triumph in his eyes. 'Musha, long life to it,' he said, 'but meself 's the quare gaby to not have remimbered it sooner. Why, the big egg mother tuk and bruck on me—why, tubbe sure, in coorse *that* one was Mrs. Morissy's chucken.'

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
FORTHCOMING BOOKS,	2
POETRY,	12
BELLES LETTRES, ANTHOLOGIES, ETC.	12
ILLUSTRATED AND GIFT BOOKS,	16
HISTORY,	17
BIOGRAPHY,	19
TRAVEL, ADVENTURE AND TOPOGRAPHY,	21
NAVAL AND MILITARY,	23
GENERAL LITERATURE,	24
PHILOSOPHY,	26
SCIENCE,	27
THEOLOGY,	27
FICTION,	32
BOOKS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS,	42
THE PEACOCK LIBRARY,	42
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERIES,	42
SOCIAL QUESTIONS OF TO-DAY	43
CLASSICAL TRANSLATIONS,	44
EDUCATIONAL BOOKS,	44

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